PRINCESS SARAH AND OTHER STORIES

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"'Princess Sarah,' he shouted, 'Her Royal Highness Princess Sarah of Nowhere.'" (Page 41.)

PRINCESS SARAH
AND OTHER STORIES

BY

JOHN STRANGE WINTER

AUTHOR OF
"BOOTLES' BABY" "MIGNON'S SECRET" "MY POOR DICK"
"HE WENT FOR A SOLDIER" ETC ETC

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"Take this lesson to thy heart;
That is best which lieth nearest."
--Gasper Bacerra

CHAPTER I

ORPHANED

In a poor little street in a crowded city there stood a small house, not alone, but in the middle of a row of other houses exactly like it. There was a tiny bow window on the left of the door, and two very small sash windows in the storey above; the frames were warped, and the paint, like that of the door, was blistered and cracked in many places. And the doorstep looked as if it had been cleaned a week or so before with whiting instead of pipe-clay, and evidently the person who had done it had, doubtless with the very best intentions in the world, given the lower part of the door a few daubs with the same cloth, which had not at all improved its shabby surface.

Between the house and the pavement there was a small garden, a very hum-

ble attempt at a garden, with a rockery in one corner and a raised bed in the middle.

It was a noisy street, though it was not a thoroughfare, for on that hot, sultry day the doors and windows were all open and the children were all playing about pavements and road, caring little for the heat and dust, screaming, laughing, shouting, crying, as children will, except when they found themselves within reach of the house which I have described; then their voices were hushed, their tones sobered; then they stood to gaze up at the closed blinds which beat now and then against the open windows, as if a door had been opened and allowed a draught of air to sweep through the house; then one little maid of ten years old or so lifted a warning finger to check a lesser child, upon whom the fear and knowledge of death had not yet fallen. "Hush--sh! Don't make a noise, Annie," she said. "Mr. Gray is dead."

The younger child, Annie, ceased her laughter, turning from the closed house to stare at two ladies who came slowly down the street, looking from side to side as if they sought one of the houses in particular.

"This must be it," said one, as her eyes fell upon the closed blinds.

"Yes," returned the other; "that must be it."

So they passed in at the little gate and knocked softly at the shabby door.

"Poor fellow!" said one, with a glance at the bit of garden before the bow window, "*his* doing, evidently; there's not another garden in the street like it."

"No. And what pains he must have taken with it. Poor fellow!" echoed the other.

There was a moment's scuffle within the house, the sound of loudly-whispering voices; then a heavy footstep, and the door was opened by a stout, elderly person in a shabby black gown and white apron--a person who was unmistakably a nurse. She curtsied as she saw the ladies, and the one who had spoken last addressed her.

"We heard early this morning. I see the sad news is too true," she began.

"Yes'm," shaking her head. "He went off quite quiet about ten o'clock last night. Ah, I've seen a-many, but I never saw a more peaceful end--never!"

The two ladies each made a murmur of sympathy.

"And the little girl?" said one of them.

"Well, mum, she do fret a good bit," replied the nurse pityingly.

"Poor little thing! We have brought some fruit and some other little things," said the lady, handing a basket to the nurse.

"It's real kind of you, mum!" the old woman cried. "She'll be rare and pleased, she will, poor little missy! You see, mum, it's been a queer, strange life for a child, for she's been everything to him, and she never could go out and play in the street with the other children. That couldn't be, and it was hard for the little thing to see

'em and be shut off from 'em all day as she was; and the master on that account used to make hisself more to her, which will make it all the harder for her now, poor fatherless, motherless lamb that she is!"

"Of course, of course. Poor little maid! And what will become of her, do you think?"

"I can't say for certain, mum; but the mistress, she had relations, and the master wrote to one of them on Thursday. He was sore troubled about little missy, was the master--aye, sore troubled. The letter was sent, and an answer came this morning to say that one of missy's aunts was coming to-day. The vicar opened it."

"Oh, well, I'm glad somebody is coming to the poor child," said the lady who had brought the basket of fruit. "I hope it will be all right. And you will give her the things, nurse?" with a look at the basket.

"Oh, yes, mum," with a curtsey.

There was not only some fruit in the basket, but a pot of jam and a jar of potted meat, a glass of jelly, some sponge cakes, and a packet of sweeties, such as little folk love.

The old nurse carried them into the sitting-room and set them down on the table before a little girl who was sitting beside it.

"See, missy, what a nice basket of good things Mrs. Tracy has brought for you!" the old woman cried. "Wasn't it kind of her?"

"Very kind," said the little girl, brightening up somewhat at the unexpected kindness from one almost a stranger to her.

"Grapes, Miss Sarah, and peaches, and Orleans plums; and see--potted meat! Now how could she know you're so fond of potted meat?"

"I don't know, nurse; *he* liked potted meat too, you know."

"Yes, dear, yes; but he's gone where he has all he's most fond of, you know."

"Except me," murmured Sarah, under her breath.

"Ah, that's true, my lamb; but you mustn't repine. Him as took the master away so calm and peaceful last night knew just what was best to do, and He'll do it, never fear! It's hard to bear, my honey, and sure," with a sigh, "no one knows better what bearing such is than old nurse. And--hark! to think of any one coming with a knock like that! enough to waken the----" But then she broke off short, and went to open the door.

CHAPTER II

HER NEW-FOUND AUNT

A short, stout, well-dressed woman stood upon the door-step, and the cabman was just hauling a box off the roof of his cab.

"Mr. Gray's 'ouse?" demanded the stout lady. "Ah, pore thing! I see it's all over. Pore thing! Well, I'm sorry, of course, though I don't suppose 'e'll be much loss to any one; pore, dreaming, shiftless thing!"

"Miss Sarah is here, mum," said the old nurse, pointing severely towards the door of the sitting-room.

"Miss Sarah--oh, the child! Eh, well, my dear," going into the room, and taking Sarah's limp and shaking hand, "I'm sorry to come on such an errand the first time ever I see you; but that was your pore pa's fault, not mine. I never was one to turn my back on my own flesh and blood--never, though perhaps I say it that shouldn't; but your pore pa, he was that awkward when he got a crotchet into his 'ead, that there was no doing aught with him. I think you favour your ma, my dear," she continued, with a complete change of tone. "Your pore pa-- Eh? What? oh, the cab! Yes, I'll come," and then she bustled out, fumbling at the fastening of a small leather bag which hung over her wrist, and leaving poor Sarah struck dumb with astonishment.

The child crept to the door and watched her new-found aunt settle with the cabman; and it is certain that never had Sarah seen a cabman settled with in that fashion before. They had not indulged in many cabs during the course of her short life; but, on the few occasions that they had enjoyed such luxuries, her father had paid for them with the air of a prince, and with a liberality such as made dispute out of the question. Alas, poor child! if the loving father now lying white and silent in the room above had had less of that princely air, and still less of that princely instinct of hospitality and generosity, life would at that moment probably have been very different for her. But all this was beyond Sarah, who was very young, and therefore not likely to see the advantages of the lengthened haggling process going on just then at the gate. A moment later Mrs. Stubbs entered the house again in triumph.

"Lot of thieving vagabonds them cabmen are, to be sure!" she remarked, with an air of indignation mingled with satisfaction. "But he don't get the better of me, not if I know it; and so I told him. But, dear! dear! *'Ow* like your pore ma you are, child! Stubbs 'll be glad of it--he never could abide him as is gone, pore thing! Well, well, we needn't say aught again him now, for he won't trouble us no more; only, as I say, Stubbs 'll be glad of it."

"Please, who *is* Mr. Stubbs?" Sarah asked plaintively, feeling instinctively that she had better not try to argue with this strange relative.

Mrs. Stubbs, however, was so taken aback at so unexpected a question, that she was obliged to sit down, the better to show the extent of her astonishment.

"Well, I don't 'old with it!" she exclaimed to the nurse, who had come in to

spread the cloth for a cup of tea which the visitor had expressed herself able and willing to take. "It's bringing up the child like a 'eathen in ignorance of what her own flesh and blood's very names is--'pon my word it is; it's 'eathenish."

"*Miss Sarah* doesn't understand," put in the old nurse pointedly.

For a moment Mrs. Stubbs gasped, much as she might have done if the older woman had dashed a pail of water in her face; but she took the hint with a very good grace, and turned to Sarah again.

"Your pore ma, my dear, was Stubbs' own sister," she said.

"Then Mr. Stubbs is my uncle--my own uncle?" Sarah asked.

"Your own uncle, and I'm your aunt; not your own aunt, of course, Sarah, but that's no matter. I've a good and a feeling 'eart, whatever other faults I may have to carry; and what's Stubbs' flesh and blood is my flesh and blood, and so you'll find. Besides, I've seven children of my own, and my 'eart feels for them that has no father nor mother to stand by 'em. And I believe in sticking to your own--everybody's not like *that*, Sarah, though maybe I say it that shouldn't. There is folks that believes in wearing yourself to the bone for other people's advantage, and letting your own flesh and blood starve in the gutter, so to speak. Ah, well, I ain't one of that sort, and I'm thankful for it, Sarah."

Poor little desolate Sarah, with her suddenly empty life and great aching void in her heart, crept a shade closer to her new-found aunt, and rested her tired head against her substantial arm.

"And I have seven cousins of my own?" she said, the shadows in her eyes clearing away for a moment.

"*Seven* cousins of your own!" cried Mrs. Stubbs, in an ecstasy of enjoyment. "*Seven*, Sarah, my dear! Why, I have seven children!"

"And have I some more aunts and uncles?" Sarah asked, feeling not a little bewildered.

"Why, dear, yes, three aunts and two uncles on your pore ma's side, to say naught of all there may be on your pa's side, with which I'm not familiar," said Mrs. Stubbs, with a certain air such as conveyed to Sarah that her ignorance was a decided loss to her father's family in general.

"There's your Uncle Joe--he 'as five boys, and lives at 'Ampstead; and there's your Uncle George--he 'as only three girls, and lives in great style at Brighton. He's in the corn trade, is your Uncle George."

Instinctively Sarah realized why once, when they had been going to the seaside for a fortnight, her father had said, "No, no, not Brighton," when that town was suggested; and as instinctively she kept the recollection to herself.

"And then there's Polly--your Aunt Mary, Sarah! She's the fine lady of the family--very 'aughty, she is, though her and me 'as always been very good friends, always. Still, she's uncommon 'aughty, and maybe she 'as a right, for she married

a gentleman in the City, and keeps her carriage and pair and a footman, too. Ah, well! she 'asn't a family, 'asn't Mrs. Lennard; perhaps if she 'ad 'ad seven children, like me, she'd have 'ad to be content with a broom, as I am."

"We have a broom, too," said Sarah, watching the visitor stir her tea round and round; "indeed, we have two, and a very old one that Jane uses to sweep out the yard with."

For a minute Mrs. Stubbs was too thoroughly astounded to speak; then she subsided into weak fits of laughter, such as told Sarah she had made a terrible mistake somehow.

"A very old one to sweep out the yard with!" Mrs. Stubbs cried in gasps. "Oh, dear, dear! Why, child, you're just like a little 'eathen. A broom is a carriage, a close carriage, something like a four-wheel cab, only better. Oh, dear, dear! and we keep three, do we? Oh, *what* a joke to tell Stubbs!"

"Miss Sarah knows," struck in the old nurse, with some indignation; "the doctor's carriage is what Mrs. Stubbs calls a broom, dearie."

Sarah turned her crimson face from one to the other. "But Father always called that kind of carriage a *bro*-am," she emphasized, "and I didn't know you meant the same, Aunt."

"Well, never mind, my dear; I shouldn't 'ave laughed at you," returned Mrs. Stubbs, stirring her tea again with fat complaisance. "Little folks can't be expected to know everything, though there are some as does expect it, and most unreasonable it is of 'em. Only, Sarah, it's more stylish to say broom, so try to think of it, there's a good girl."

"I'll try," said Sarah, hoping that she had somewhat retrieved her character by knowing what kind of carriage her aunt meant by a "broom."

Then Mrs. Stubbs had another cup of tea, which she seemed to enjoy particularly.

"And you would like to go upstairs, mum?" said the nurse, as she set the cup down.

"Why, yes, nurse, it's my duty to go, and I'm not one as is ever backward in doing 'er duty," Mrs. Stubbs replied, upheaving herself from the somewhat uncertain depths of the big chair, the only easy chair in the house.

So the two women went up above together to visit that something which Sarah had not seen since the moment of death.

She sat just where they left her--a way she had, for Sarah was a very quiet child--wondering how life would be with this new-found aunt of hers. She was very kind, Sarah decided, and would be very good to her, she knew; and yet--yet--there was something about her from which she shrank instinctively--something she knew would have offended her father beyond everything.

Poor Sarah! At that moment Mrs. Stubbs was standing beside all that was

left of him that had loved her so dearly during all the years of her short life.

"Pore thing!" she was saying. "Pore thing! We weren't good friends, nurse, but we must not think of that now; and I'll be a mother to his little girl just as if there'd never been a cloud between us. Pore thing, only thirty-six! Ah, well, pore thing; but he makes a pretty corpse!"

[image]

"Pore thing!" she was saying. "Pore thing!"

CHAPTER III

SARAH'S FUTURE IS ARRANGED

Two days later Sarah's father was buried, laid quietly away in a pretty little churchyard two miles outside the town, beside the young wife who had died nine years before.

The funeral was a very unostentatious affair; only one cab followed the coffin, and contained Sarah and Mrs. Stubbs, the old nurse, and Jane, the untidy little maid, who, after the manner of her sort, wept and sobbed and choked, until Mrs. Stubbs would right willingly have given her a good shaking.

Sarah was very subdued and quiet, and Mrs. Stubbs cried a little, and would have cried more had she not been so taken up with keeping an eye on "that stupid ninny Jane."

And then they went back to the little hot, stuffy house, and had a cup of tea, after which the vicar of the parish called and had a long talk with Mrs. Stubbs about Sarah's future.

"I can't say we was good friends with him, pore thing," Mrs. Stubbs explained; "but when death comes between, little differences should be forgotten. And Stubbs and me will forget all our differences now; it's Stubbs' wish as well as mine. I believe in sticking to your own flesh and blood, for if your own won't, whose can you expect to do it? So Sarah and me is the best of friends, and she is going back with me to share and share alike with my own children."

"Oh, you are going to take Sarah," said the vicar, who had felt a great interest in the dreamy artist whom they had just left to his last long rest in the quiet

country churchyard; "that is very good of you, very good of you. I have been wondering what would become of the poor little woman."

"Why, what should become of her?" Mrs. Stubbs said indignantly. "Her mother was Stubbs' own sister."

"Yes," said the vicar, smiling; "but it is not every lady who would at all encourage the idea of bringing up a child because her mother happened to be her husband's sister."

"You're right there, Mr. Moore; you are right," Mrs. Stubbs cried; "but some women 'ave 'earts of stone instead of flesh and blood. I'm not one of that sort."

"And about the furniture, and so on," the vicar broke in, having heard Mrs. Stubbs's remarks about her own good qualities several times already.

Mrs. Stubbs looked round the room in good-natured contempt. "There's nothing to speak of," she answered--and she was right enough--"but what there is 'll have to go to paying for the doctor and the undertaker. If there's a few pounds left over, Stubbs says put it into the savings bank and let the child 'ave it when she grows up. She'll want to buy a ring or something to remember her father by."

"And you are going to take the sole charge and expense of her?" the vicar exclaimed.

"Oh, yes. We've seven of our own, and when you've so many, one more or less makes very little difference. But I wanted to ask you something else, Mr. Moore, and I'll ask it before it slips my memory. You know Mr. Gray--'e's gone now, pore thing, and I don't wish to say aught against him--brought Sarah up in a very strange way; indeed, as I said at the time to the nurse, it's quite 'eathenish; and, it you'll believe me, sir, she didn't even know how many aunts and uncles she 'ad, nor what our very names were. But he 'as taught her some things, and playing the fiddle is one."

"Yes, Sarah plays the violin remarkably well for her age," said the vicar promptly.

"Yes, so the old nurse says," returned Mrs. Stubbs, with an air of melancholy. "But I don't altogether 'old with it myself; it seems to me such an outlandish thing for a little girl to play on. I wish it had been the piano or the 'arp! There's so much more style about them."

"The violin is the most fashionable instrument a lady can learn just now, Mrs. Stubbs," put in the clergyman hastily, wishing to secure Sarah the free use of her beloved violin, if it were possible.

"Dear me. You don't say so. What, are young ladies about 'ere learning it?" Mrs. Stubbs asked, with interest.

"Yes. I was dining at Lord Allington's last week, and in the evening one of his daughters played a violin solo; but she doesn't play nearly as well as Sarah," he replied.

"Then Sarah shall keep her violin and play to her 'eart's content," Mrs. Stubbs cried enthusiastically. "That was what I wanted to ask you--if you thought I should encourage or discourage the child in keeping it up. But, as you say so plainly encourage, I will; and Sarah shall 'ave good lessons as soon as she's fairly settled down at 'ome."

[image]

"Then Sarah shall keep her violin and play to her 'eart's content."

"That will be the greatest delight to Sarah, for the child loves her violin," said the vicar heartily; "and that is not all, Mrs. Stubbs--but, if she goes on as she has begun, there will always be a useful, or at least a remunerative, accomplishment at her fingers' ends."

"Oh, as to that," returned Mrs. Stubbs, with a lordly indifference to money such as told her visitor that she was well blessed with worldly goods, "Stubbs 'll provide for the child along with his own, and maybe her other uncles and aunts 'll do something for her, too. I will say that for *his* family, as a family they're not mean. I will say that for 'em."

So Sarah's future was arranged. She was to go home with Mrs. Stubbs, who lived at South Kensington, and be one with her children. She was to have the best violin lessons to be had for love or money; and Mrs. Stubbs, in the warmth of her kindly but vulgar heart, even went so far as to suggest that if Sarah was a very good, industrious girl, and got on well with her practising, her uncle might very likely be induced to buy her a new violin for her next birthday, instead of the dingy old thing she was playing on now.

Poor, well-meaning Mrs. Stubbs! She little knew that the whole of Sarah's grateful soul rose in loathing at the suggestion. She dropped her bow upon the nearest chair, and hugged her precious violin as closely to her breast as if it had been a thing of life, and that life was threatened.

"Oh, Auntie!" she burst out; "a new violin!"

"Yes, child; I think it's very likely," returned Mrs. Stubbs, delighted to see the effect of her suggestion upon her pale little niece, and quite mistaking the meaning of her emotion. "Your uncle is very fond of making nice presents. He gave May a new piano last Christmas."

"But," gasped Sarah, "my violin is a real Amati! It belonged to my grandfather."

"And if it did, what then?" ejaculated Mrs. Stubbs, in no way impressed by the information. "All the more reason why you should 'ave a new one. The

wonder to me is you play half as well as you do on an old thing like that."

"It's--it's worth five hundred pounds!" Sarah cried, her face in a flame.

[image]

"It's--it's worth five hundred pounds!"

Mrs. Stubbs fairly gasped in her surprise. "Sarah," she said, "what are you saying? Little girls ought not to tell stories; it's wicked. Do you know where you'll go to? Sarah, I'm shocked and surprised at you!"

"Auntie, dear," said Sarah, "it's true--all true. It is, indeed! Ask the doctor, ask the vicar--ask *any* one who knows about violins, and they'll tell you! It's a real Amati; it's worth five hundred pounds--perhaps more. I'm not telling stories, Auntie, but Father was offered that much for it, only he wouldn't take it because he said it was all he had to give me, and that it would be worth more to me some day."

Never had Mrs. Stubbs heard Sarah say so much at one time before; but her earnest face and manner carried conviction with them, and she saw that the child knew what she was talking about, and was speaking only what she believed to be the truth.

"You really mean it, Sarah?" she asked, putting out a hand to touch the wonderful instrument.

"Oh, yes, Auntie, it's *absolutely* true," returned Sarah, using the longest adjective she could think of the better to impress her aunt.

"Then," exclaimed the good lady, with radiant triumph, "you'd better 'old your tongue about it, Sarah, and not say a word about it--or you'll be 'aving the Probate people down on you, robbing the fatherless and the orphan."

CHAPTER IV

HER NEW HOME

At last Mr. Gray's affairs were all cleared up, and Sarah was about to leave dingy old Bridgehampton behind for ever to take up her new life in London, the great city of the world.

There were some very sad farewells to be made still; and Mrs. Stubbs was

a woman of very good feeling, and encouraged the child to go and say good-bye to everybody who had been kind to her in the past.

"There is Mrs. Tracy," said Sarah on the last day. "She brought me all that fruit and jam and the other things, Auntie."

"Oh, you must go and say good-bye to 'er, of course," returned Mrs. Stubbs; "and we must go and see your pore pa's grave, for 'eaven knows when you'll see it again."

"I should like to do that, please," said Sarah in a very low voice.

"Well, *I* can't drag out all that way," remarked Mrs. Stubbs, who, being stout, was not good at walking exercise. "We'll have an open carriage if nurse can get one; and nurse shall go too."

So Sarah went and said "good-bye" to her father's grave; and the wise old nurse, after a minute spent beside it, drew Mrs. Stubbs away to the other side of the pretty churchyard to show her a curious tombstone about which she had been telling her as they drove along. So Sarah, for a few minutes, was left alone--free to kneel down and bid her farewell in peace.

It was a relief to the child to be alone, for Mrs. Stubbs, though meaning to be kindness itself, was not a woman in whose presence it was possible to grieve in comfort. Her remarks about "your pore pa" invariably had the effect of stifling any feeling of emotion which was aroused in her childish heart.

She was very good. Sarah knew that she meant to be so.

"I'll try not to mind the difference, dear Father," she whispered to the brown sods above his dear head. "It's all so different to you, so different to when there was just you and I together. Nobody will ever understand me like you, dear Daddy; but Auntie means to be very kind, and I'll try my hardest to grow up so that you'll love me better when we meet again."

As she rose up, Mrs. Stubbs and the nurse were coming across the grass between the graves to fetch her. Mrs. Stubbs noticed the tears on her cheeks and still flooding her eyes.

"Nay, now, you mustn't fret, Sarah," she said kindly; "'e's better off, pore thing, than when he was 'ere, so you mustn't fret for 'im, there's a good girl."

Sarah wiped her eyes, and turned to go away. She said nothing, for she knew it was no use trying to make her aunt understand that her tears had not been so much for him as for herself. And Mrs. Stubbs stood for a moment looking down upon the mould, with its covering of brown, disjointed sods and its faded wreaths.

"Pore thing!" she murmured; "it's a sad end to 'ave. And he must 'ave felt leaving the little one badly 'fore he brought himself to write that letter! Pore thing! Well, I'm not one to bear ill-will for what's past and gone, and so beyond 'elp now; and I'll be as much a mother to Sarah as if 'im and me had always been

the best of friends. 'E once said I was vulgar--and perhaps I am--it's vulgar to 'ave 'earts and such like, and he knows better now, pore thing! For I have a 'eart. Yes, and the Queen upon 'er throne, she has a 'eart, too, bless her."

There were tears on the good soul's cheeks as she turned to follow Sarah, whom she found at the gate waiting for her. By the time she had reached the child she had wiped them, but Sarah saw that they had been there.

"Dear Auntie," she said. "He wasn't friends with you, but he knows how good you are now,"--and then she flung her arms round her, and her victory over her uncle's wife was complete.

"Sarah," she said, when they were nearly at the end of their journey, "you have never 'ad any playfellows, have you, dear?"

"Never, Auntie--not *real* playfellows," Sarah answered, and flushing up with joy at the anticipation of those who were in store for her.

"Well, I'd better warn you, Sarah--it may not be all sugar and honey till you get used to them," said Mrs. Stubbs solemnly. "There's a good deal of give and take about children's ways; that is, if you want to get on peaceable. If you get a knock, you must just bear it without telling, or else you get called a 'tell-pie,' and treated according. It's what I've never encouraged, and I must do my children the justice to say if they gets a knock they gives it back again, and there's no more about it."

Thus Sarah was somewhat prepared for the darker side of her new life, though she gathered no true idea of the nest of young ruffians to whom she was made known an hour later.

They came out with a rush to the door when the carriage stopped, and welcomed their mother home again with a fluent and boisterous torrent of joy truly appalling to the little quiet and retiring Sarah, who was not accustomed to the domestic manners of children of the Stubbs class.

"Ma, what have you brought me?"

"Is that Sarah, Ma? My, ain't she a littl'un!"

"Ma, Mary was late this morning. Yes, and our kao-kao was burnt--I told her I should tell you."

"Pa slapped Johnnie last night, because he wouldn't be washed to come down to dessert."

"And Flossie has torn her best frock."

"And May----"

"Hush! Be quiet, children!" exclaimed Mrs. Stubbs, holding her hands to her ears. "'Pon my word, you're like a lot of young savages. Miss Clark can't have taken much care of you whilst I've bin away. Really, you're enough to frighten Sarah out of her senses. This is your cousin Sarah. She's going to live 'ere in future, so come and say ''Ow d'ye do?' to her nicely."

Thus bidden, the young Stubbses all turned their attention on their new

cousin, and said their greeting and shook hands with various kinds of manner.

There was May, aged fourteen, a very consequential young person, with an inclination to be short and stout, like her mother, and had her nice fair hair plaited into a tail behind and tied with a bunch of mauve ribbon, worn with a white frock in memory of the uncle by marriage whom she had never seen.

"How d'you do, Cousin Sarah?" she said, with a fine-lady air which petrified poor Sarah, who thought that and her cousin's earrings and watch-chain the finest things she had ever beheld about any human being before. Then there came the redoubtable Flossie, who had torn her best frock, and was twelve and a half. Flossie, who was nearly as big as May, came forward with a giggle, and said "How----" and went off into fits of laughter at some private joke of her own.

"I'm ashamed of you, Flossie," cried Mrs. Stubbs sharply; "shake 'ands with your cousin Sarah at once. Ah! this is Lily--Lily's five and a 'alf, Sarah--she's the baby."

Then there was Tom, the eldest boy, who gripped hold of Sarah's hand and wrung it until she could have shrieked with the pain, but, taking it as an expression of kindness and welcome, she bore it bravely and looked at him with a smiling face; she knew better afterwards.

After Tom came the twins, Minnie and the Johnnie who had been slapped the day before; and last of all, Janey, the prettiest, and Sarah fancied the sweetest, of them all. Janey was seven, or, as she said herself, nearly eight.

"I suppose," said Mrs. Stubbs, addressing herself to Flossie, "that your pa 'asn't got 'ome yet?"

"No, Ma, not yet," returned Flossie.

But, presently, when Mrs. Stubbs had changed her dress for a garment such as Sarah had never beheld before, and which May told her was a tea-gown, and was enjoying a cup of sweet-smelling tea in the large and shady drawing-room--to Sarah a perfect dream of beauty--he came! Came with a bustle and noise like a tempest, and caught his stout wife round the waist, with a "Hulloa, old woman, it's a sight for sore eyes to see you 'ome again!"

Sarah had determined to be surprised at nothing, but her Uncle Stubbs was altogether too much for her resolution. In apologising to herself afterwards, she said she was obliged to stare.

"And where's the little lass?" Mr. Stubbs asked when he had kissed his wife. "Oh, there! Well, aren't you going to speak to your uncle, eh?"

"Yes, Uncle," said Sarah shyly.

He drew her nearer to him, and turned her face to the light.

"Like her dear ma," put in Mrs. Stubbs.

"Yes," said Mr. Stubbs shortly.

"Not like her pa at all," Mrs. Stubbs persisted.

"No!" more shortly still; then, after a pause, "I 'ope you'll be a good gal, Sarah, and remember, though your father and me wasn't friends, yet, as long as I've a 'ome to call my own, you're welcome to a shelter in it. Your mother was my favourite sister, and though she turned 'er back on me, I'll never do that on you, never."

"Father knows better now, Uncle," said the child, with an effort; "he knows how good you and Auntie are to me. You'd be friends now, wouldn't you?" earnestly.

"I don't know--I don't know at all," replied Mr. Stubbs shortly; then, struck by the pleading look on the child's wistful face, added gruffly, "I suppose we should; any way, I hope so."

At this point Mrs. Stubbs broke in,--

"Any way, it's no fault of Sarah's that we wasn't all the very best of friends, Stubbs; and Sarah and me's real fond of one another already, aren't we, Sarah? So say no more about it; what's past and gone is beyond 'elp. Flossie, you can take Sarah upstairs now. It's just six--time for your tea. Be sure she gets a good tea."

CHAPTER V

A TASTE OF THE FUTURE

Thus bidden, Flossie took Sarah's hand and led her upstairs. "You won't like Miss Clark," she remarked, as they went. "We don't like her, not any of us. She's so mean; always telling tales about somebody. She got Johnnie slapped and sent off to bed last night; it was all spite--nasty old thing!"

"Who is Miss Clark?" Sarah asked, feeling rather bewildered.

"Miss Clark! What! didn't Ma tell you about her?" ejaculated Miss Flossie, in surprise.

"No; Auntie never told me about her at all."

"Lor! There, that shows Ma herself don't think much of her! I'll tell Miss Clark, any way."

"Don't, don't!" Sarah cried, in an agony.

"Yes, I shall," the amiable Flossie returned, suddenly opening a door and dragging her cousin into the midst of a noisy crew, all squabbling round a tea-table. "Miss Clark, what d'you think? Ma actually never told Sarah a single word about you!"

"Well, my dear, never mind; perhaps Mrs. Stubbs didn't say very much about any of us."

"She didn't," put in Sarah hastily.

"I suppose this is Sarah?" Miss Clark went on.

"Yes," answered Flossie, adding, under her breath to Johnnie, "Stupid little thing!"

"How do you do, Sarah?" asked the governess, with the air of primness which had made her unruly young pupils dislike her. "I hope we shall be very good friends, and that you will do your best to be a very tidy and industrious little girl."

This rather took Sarah's breath away, but she replied, politely, that she would try her best.

"Come and sit by me, Sarah," said May, with a very condescending air of protection.

"Yes, sit by May," added Miss Clark. "May is my right hand; without May I could not endure all the worry and trial of the others. Copy May, and you will be quite right."

So Sarah watched May mincing with her knife and fork, and conscientiously tried to do likewise, to the infinite amusement of the younger ones, of whom May took no notice whatever, and to whose jibing remarks she showed a superb indifference.

"Sarah," shouted Tom, stuffing his mouth so full of pressed tongue and bread-and-butter that Sarah's heart stood still for fear of his choking, "how many pieces of bread-and-butter can you put into your mouth at once?"

"Disgusting boy!" remarked May disdainfully, without giving Sarah time to reply. "You grow more atrociously vulgar every day you live!"

"Hi, hi!" shouted Tom, seizing a tablespoon and ramming it down his throat until even boy's nature revolted and expressed disapproval.

"Put that spoon down," cried Miss Clark authoritatively. "If I see you do that again, Tom, you shall not go down to dessert."

Now this was almost the only threat by which poor Miss Clark, whose life was one long-continued struggle and fight, was able to hold her own over Tom when he was at home for his holidays. Not going down to dessert meant, not only the punishment of losing a share of the good things below, but also it meant inquiry as to the cause of absence, and other effects according to evidence.

Tom's exuberance of spirits settled down promptly into discreet behaviour, and Miss Clark had time to look round the table.

"Johnnie, you are forbidden to eat jam for a week," she burst out. "Minnie, take his plate away."

"It's a shame poor Johnnie isn't to have any jam," Minnie began whining-

-"all for nothing, too. It's a real downright shame, it is," and forthwith she took the opportunity of daubing a thick slice of bread-and-butter with jam off her own plate, and smuggling it into the luckless Johnnie's hand in such a way that he might eat it upside down, to the intense delight of Tom opposite, who had seen the little manoeuvre, and was bursting to disclose it.

For once nodding and winking had no effect, for nobody happened to be looking at him. So Tom, in despair lest such an amusing incident should be altogether lost, began vigorously nudging Flossie, who sat next to him, with his elbow. Flossie, unfortunately, was in the act of raising a large cup of very hot tea to her lips, and Tom's nudge causing the hot cup to touch her knuckle, made her jerk violently, and over the tea went in a deluge on to her lap.

It is almost impossible to give an adequate description of the scene which followed. Flossie shrieked and screamed as if she was being murdered by a slow process; Tom vowed and protested that it was not his fault; Janey had pushed him over against Flossie; Janey appealed to Miss Clark to remember that at the very moment she was handing her cup in the opposite direction; and Miss Clark began to wring her hands and exclaim that she would ask to have Tom sent back to school again, for stand his cruel and unbrotherly behaviour she neither could nor would. And in the midst of it all, young Johnnie seized the opportunity of helping Minnie freely to jam and eating off her plate, as if he were eating for a wager.

Sarah sat looking, as she was, scared; and May calmly surveyed the scene of uproar with disdainful face.

"Disgusting boy!" she said to the still protesting Tom. "You get more vulgar every day. Don't take any notice, Sarah; you will get used to it by-and-by."

Eventually Miss Clark began to cry weakly.

"It's too much for me; how am I to bear four weeks more of this dreadful boy?" she sobbed.

"Do like me, take no notice," suggested May.

"But I *must* take notice," Miss Clark cried desperately. "My only comfort is that you do sit still, May dear. As for Sarah, she is a good girl, a pattern to you," with a withering glance at Tom. "I feel sure Sarah has never seen such a disgraceful scene before; have you, Sarah?"

"No," whispered Sarah, wishing fervently that Miss Clark had been pleased to leave her out of the discussion.

"I thought so. I knew Sarah's manners were far too good for her to have been brought up among this sort of thing. Sarah is like a young princess."

By this time the tumult had subsided a little. Flossie had recovered from her fright, and was consoling herself with buttered scones and honey, looking darkly at Tom the while, just by way of reminding him that she had not by any means

forgotten. But Tom was unconscious of her wrath--a fresh idea had presented itself to his volatile mind, and for the moment he had utterly forgotten not only Flossie's wrath, but also that other probable wrath to come.

"Princess Sarah!" he shouted, pointing at his cousin. "Her Royal Highness Princess Sarah--of Nowhere. Princess Sarah!"

"Princess Sarah!" cried Johnnie, taking up the taunt, and waving his bread-and-butter like a flag. "Three cheers for Princess Sarah!"

CHAPTER VI

THE AMIABLE FLOSSIE

Miss Clark did not tell that time. It was not Flossie, but May, who poured oil on the troubled waters.

"It's no use making a fuss, Flossie," she said wisely. "Tom didn't mean to spill your tea; he only wanted you to look at Johnnie cribbing jam when he'd been told not to have any. And it's the first night Ma's at home, and Tom's her favourite; and if you get him into trouble with Pa, she'll give what she's brought for you to somebody else. So you just hold your tongue, Flossie, and be a bit nice to Miss Clark, and get her to say nothing about it. It isn't as if you were hurt--and besides, you can't pretend you're hurt and then go down to dessert. It's your turn to go down to-night." Thus advised, Flossie went to Miss Clark and begged her to say nothing more about Tom's unfortunate accident.

"Tom says he didn't mean to, Miss Clark, and Ma's tired, I dare say; so you won't say anything about it, will you?"

"I think I ought to say something about it, Flossie," said Miss Clark severely, though in her heart she was as glad to get off telling as even Tom himself could be.

"No, Miss Clark, I don't think you ought. Ma always gets a headache after a long journey, and if Pa's put out with Tom, and perhaps whips him, Ma 'll go to bed and cry all night. And it wasn't as if Tom meant to spill the tea over me--it was quite an accident. He was only jogging me to look at Johnnie."

With much apparent reluctance, Miss Clark at last consented to say no more about it; and so occupied was she in making Flossie feel how great a concession it was for her to do so, that she forgot to ask what Johnnie had happened to be doing to attract Tom's attention.

So Johnnie escaped scot free also, and Flossie and Tom went off to prepare for going down to dessert, which the young Stubbses did in strict turn, two at a time.

As soon as the table was cleared, Miss Clark got out a little work-box and began a delicate piece of embroidery. Sarah kept close to May, whom at present she liked best of any of the young people and May sat down with a piece of fancy work also, of which she did very little.

"Miss Clark," she began, after she had done a few stitches, "isn't it jolly without Tom?"

"Very," said Miss Clark, with a great sigh of relief.

"I don't think Tom meant to be disagreeable," said May, turning Miss Clark's silks over with careless fingers; "but he's a boy, and boys are very tiresome animals, Miss Clark."

"Yes," Miss Clark replied.

"How many times have you been engaged?" and May leant her elbows upon the table and regarded the governess with interested eyes.

[image]

"How many times have you been engaged?"

"Twice," answered Miss Clark, in a low voice.

"And he was nice?" May inquired, with vivid interest.

"I thought them both nice at the time," Miss Clark returned, with a sigh and a smile. "But--oh, here is Flossie ready to go down. Flossie, my dear, how quick you have been!"

"But I'm quite tidy, Miss Clark," Flossie replied. "I wish Tom would be quick. I say, Sarah, don't you wish you were going down, too?"

"Sarah's quite happy with Miss Clark and me," put in May; "ain't you, Sarah?"

"Yes, quite," Sarah replied.

"Oh, are you? Then I shall tell Ma you said you didn't want to go down to see her, then," Flossie retorted.

Poor Sarah's eyes filled with tears, and she turned to May in the hope of getting protection from her.

"Take no notice," said May superbly. "You'll get used to Flossie after a bit. She's a regular tell-tale; but she won't tell Ma, for Ma won't listen. She never does. Ma never will listen to tales, not even from Tom."

Flossie began to laugh uproariously, as if it was the greatest joke in the world to tease Sarah, who had yet to learn the peculiar workings of a Stubbs character.

Then Miss Clark interrupted with a remark that Flossie's sash was not very well tied.

"Come here and let me tie it properly," she said sharply; and, as Flossie knew that any shortcoming would be sharply noticed and commented upon when she got downstairs, she turned obediently round and allowed Miss Clark to arrange her garments to her satisfaction. By that time Tom was ready, and the two went down together.

"Thank goodness," remarked May piously. "Now, Miss Clark, we shall have a little peace."

May was destined to have even a greater peace for her little chat with the governess than she had anticipated, for a few minutes after Flossie and Tom had gone downstairs one of the maids came up and said that the mistress wished Miss Sarah to come down at once. Miss Sarah, she added, was not to stay to dress more than she was then.

"Mayn't I just wash my hands?" Sarah asked imploringly of May.

"Of course," May answered, good-naturedly. "I'll go with you and make you straight."

May was very good-natured, though it is true that she was somewhat condescending; and she went with Sarah and showed her the room she was to share with Janey and Lily, showed her where to wash her face and hands, and herself combed her hair and made her look quite presentable.

"There! you look all right; let Miss Clark see you," she said. And, after Sarah had been for inspection and approval, she followed the maid, and went down, for the first time in her life, to dessert.

"'Ere she is!" Mrs. Stubbs exclaimed, as the little figure in black appeared in the doorway. "Flossie ought to have known you would come down to dessert the first evening; and, after that, you must take it in turn with the others."

"Yes, Auntie," said Sarah shyly, taking the chair next to Mrs. Stubbs, for which she was thankful.

"Will you 'ave some grapes, my dear?" Mrs. Stubbs asked kindly.

"Sarah 'd like a nectarine," said Mr. Stubbs, who made a god of his stomach, and loved good things.

"I doubt if she will," his wife said; "they're bitter to a child's taste; but 'ave which you like best, Sarah."

"Grapes, please, Auntie," said Sarah promptly.

As a matter of fact, Sarah did not exactly know what nectarines were; and, not liking to confess her ignorance, lest by doing so she should bring on herself sarcastic glances, to be followed later by sarcastic remarks from Flossie and Tom, she chose what she was sure of; besides, she did not want to run the risk of getting something upon her plate which she did not like, and perhaps could not eat. Poor

Sarah still had a lively recollection of once helping herself to a piece of crystallised ginger when out to tea with her father. She could not bear hot things, and it seemed to her that that piece of ginger was the hottest morsel she had ever put in her mouth. She sucked and sucked in the hope of reducing it, and so getting rid of it, and the harder she sucked the hotter it grew. She tried crushing it between her sharp young teeth, but that process only seemed to bring out the heat more and more.

And at last, in sheer desperation, Sarah bethought herself of her pocket-handkerchief, and, putting it up as if to wipe her lips, ejected the pungent morsel, and at the same time seized the opportunity of putting her poor little burning tongue out to cool.

"Have another piece of ginger, dear," the lady of the house had said, seeing that her plate was empty.

CHAPTER VII

COUSINLY AMENITIES

The following morning Mrs. Stubbs began preparing vigorously for the move to Brighton, which the family invariably made at this time of the year. Usually, indeed, they went a week or so earlier, but Mrs. Stubbs being at Bridgehampton, Miss Clark had done no more towards going than to see that the children's summer and seaside frocks and other clothes were all ready.

"I think May and Flossie must 'ave new white best frocks," Mrs. Stubbs remarked; "and Sarah's things must be attended to. I knew it was no use getting the child anything but a black frock in that old-fashioned Bridge'ampton. I'd better go and see about them this morning; and if they're not done by Thursday they can come after us."

So Sarah was dressed, and with May went out in the neat "broom" with Mrs. Stubbs; and when she had arranged about the white frocks for her own children, Mrs. Stubbs began to lay in a stock of clothes for Sarah. Poor Sarah was bewildered, and felt more ready to cry than anything else.

"Am I to wear *all* these?" she asked, with what was almost horror, as she surveyed the pile of stockings, petticoats, gloves, sash-ribbons, pocket-handkerchiefs, and such things, which quickly accumulated upon the counter.

Mrs. Stubbs laughed good-naturedly. "You won't say 'all' when you've been

a month at Brighton grubbing about on the shingle and going donkey-rides, and such like. You must be tidy, you know, Sarah. And I told you" (in an undertone) "that you would be the same as my own. I never do things by 'alves; I'm not one of that sort, thank 'eaven."

So, to Sarah's dismay, she bought lavishly of many things--frocks, boots, smart pinafores, a pretty, light summer jacket, and two hats, one a white sailor hat, the other a black trimmed one for best.

"Do you take cold easy, Sarah?" Mrs. Stubbs inquired, pausing as they went out of the showroom before a huge pile of furs.

"I think I do rather, Auntie; and I had bronchitis last year."

"That settles it!" her aunt exclaimed. "I don't believe in bronchitis and doctors' bills; waste of money, I call it. You shall 'ave a fur cape."

Now for two years past the dream of Sarah's life had been to possess a fur cape--"a beautiful, warm, soft, and lovely fur cape," as she expressed it; but until now, poor child, she had never dared to think it might ever be more than a dream--that it might come to be a possibility or a reality. The sudden realization was almost too much for her. She gave a little gasp of delight, and squeezed her aunt's arm *hard*.

"Oh, Auntie!" she whispered, with a sob of delight, "what shall I ever do for you?"

"Nay, nay! don't, Sarah!" Mrs. Stubbs expostulated, fearing the child was going to break down. "Be a good girl and love your aunt, that's all, dear."

"Oh, Auntie, I do, I do!" Sarah whispered back; "but if only Father knew--if only he knew!"

"Why, maybe he does," said Mrs. Stubbs kindly. "But come, Sarah, my dear, let us try your cape on. We are wasting this gentleman's time."

The gentleman in question protested that it was of no consequence, and begged Mrs. Stubbs not to hurry herself. But time was passing, and Mrs. Stubbs wanted to get home again, so she urged Sarah to be quick.

Ten minutes later Sarah was the proud possessor of a beautiful brown fur cape, just a little large for her, "that she might have room to grow," but so warm and cosy, and so entirely to her liking, that, in spite of the sultry day, the child would willingly have kept it on and gone home in it. She did not, however, dare to propose it to her aunt, and if she had done so Mrs. Stubbs had far too much good sense to have allowed it.

So they went home gaily enough to lunch, which was the young folk's dinner, but not without a petition from May that they should stop at some nice shop and have ices.

"It will spoil your dinner!" exclaimed Mrs. Stubbs.

"Oh, no, Mother," said May, who sometimes called her mother so. "And

Sarah *ought* to have an ice the very first time she has ever had a drive with you."

Thus pressed, Mrs. Stubbs gave in, and stopped the carriage at a confectioner's in Regent Street.

"I'll have Vanilla," said May. "Which are you going to have, Sarah?"

"Whichever you like," said Sarah, who had never tasted an ice in her life, and was thus gaining another new experience.

"Try strawberry, then," said May, "and then we can help one another to a spoonful."

Sarah did try strawberry, and very good she found it. And then, when they had each eaten about half of their ices, May proposed that they should change about. Sarah did not find the Vanilla ice nearly so much to her liking as the strawberry one had been; but not liking to say so, as her cousin seemed to appreciate the change, she finished her portion, and said she had enjoyed herself very much.

"You'll buy us some sweets, Ma?" said May.

Sarah stared aghast; it seemed to her a terrible extravagance to have had the ices, particularly after having spent so much money as her aunt must have done for the clothes that morning. And then to ask for sweets! It seemed to her that May had no conscience.

And perhaps she was not very far wrong. But May, if she had no conscience, had a wonderful knack of smoothing the path of daily life for herself. Mrs. Stubbs demurred decidedly to buying sweets; but May gave a good reason for her demand.

"Oh, Ma, dear, do! Flossie 'll be as cross as two sticks at Sarah being out with you instead of her. And she's sure to ask if we had ices, and, you know we can't either of us tell a story about it--at least, I can't, and I don't think Sarah's at all the story-telling sort--are you, Sarah?"

"Oh no, indeed, Auntie, I'll never tell you a story," Sarah protested.

"And Flossie will go on anyhow, and taunt her; I know she will. She and Tom were at it last night--calling her Princess Sarah--her Royal Highness Princess Sarah," May went on--"didn't they, Sarah?"

"Never mind," said Sarah, trying to make light of it.

"But what did they call her that for?" Mrs. Stubbs asked, listening in a way that was rare with her to a bit of tittle-tattle from the schoolroom.

"Well, Ma, dear, you know what Tom is. He doesn't mean to be rough or rude, but he's just a boy home for the holidays; and after she's had the little ones all day, and perhaps not me to talk to at all, Tom does get a bit too much for Miss Clark's nerves. And last night Tom was just a bit more boisterous than usual, and poor Miss Clark didn't feel very well, and it tried her, you know. And Sarah was sitting by me, and very quiet, and Miss Clark happened to say she behaved like a princess--and so she did. And Tom took it up--Princess Sarah, of Nowhere;

her Royal Highness Princess Sarah, of Nowhere, and such-like. I don't think Tom meant to be unkind, but it wasn't very nice for Sarah, being strange to us all; and then Flossie took it up, and Johnnie, but Miss Clark told Johnnie he should go to bed if he said it again, so he soon shut up."

"Well, it's no use taking any notice of it," said Mrs. Stubbs, stroking Sarah's hand kindly, "but you'd better put a stop to it whenever you hear 'em at it, May. I only 'ope Tom won't let his pa 'ear him. He'd be very angry, for Sarah's pore ma, that's dead and gone, was 'is favourite sister, and Pa'd never forgive a slight that was put on her little girl. It isn't," said Mrs. Stubbs, warming to her subject, "any fault of Sarah's that she's left, at nine years old, without a father, or a mother, or a 'ome; and it's no credit of any of yours that you've got a kind pa and ma, and a lux'r'ous 'ome, and a broom to ride about in. So, Sarah, my dear, don't take no notice if they begin teasing you about anything. Remember, your ma was your uncle's favourite sister, and that you was as welcome as flowers in May to him when I brought you 'ome."

Sarah looked up. "I don't mind anything, Auntie, dear," she said bravely, though her lips were trembling and her eyes were moist. "I'll remember what you told me when we were coming--give and take."

"That's a brave little woman!" Mrs. Stubbs exclaimed. "Yes, you'd better go and choose some sweets, May. Perhaps it was a little 'ard on Flossie she should have to stop at 'ome, but I can't do with more than three in the broom--it gets so 'ot and so stuffy. Perhaps, some day, your pa 'll buy us an open carriage, and then I don't mind 'ow many there are."

May went out into the shop--for they had been sitting alone in an inner room--to choose the sweets, and Mrs. Stubbs continued her talk to Sarah.

"I don't 'old with telling, as a rule; I want my children to be better than tell-pies," she said; "but I am glad May told me of this. If anything goes wrong with you, you tell May about it, Sarah; she's my right 'and; I don't know what I should do without her."

CHAPTER VIII

FLOSSIE'S GRIEVANCES

It was just as well that May had had sufficient forethought to provide herself with a bundle of sweets in the shape of a peace-offering for Flossie, for when they got

in they found Flossie in anything but an amiable mood.

And when Flossie was not in an amiable mood, she was anything but an agreeable young person.

She was sitting in the schoolroom, staring sullenly out of the window and kicking impatiently against the window-board in a way which upset Miss Clark's nerves until they could only be fairly described as "shattered."

[image]

She was sitting in the schoolroom, staring sullenly out of the window.

For everything from first to last had gone wrong with poor Flossie that morning. In the first place, she had been intensely disappointed at being left at home that Sarah might go in the carriage with Mrs. Stubbs. Flossie was particularly fond of going out with her mother in the carriage, and was also very fond of shopping. It was, therefore, quite in vain that Miss Clark tried to make her understand that Sarah had not been taken for favouritism, but simply in order that her aunt might buy her the clothes necessary for their trip to Brighton. Flossie thought and said it was a horrid shame, and vowed vengeance on the unfortunate and inoffensive, though offending, Sarah in consequence.

"Nasty little mean white-faced thing!" she exclaimed. "I suppose I shall always be shoved into the background now, just that she may be coddled up and made to think herself better than anybody else. Princess Sarah! Yes, that's to be the new idea. We're all to be put on one side for Princess Sarah."

"Flossie," said Miss Clark, very severely, "you ought to be thoroughly ashamed of yourself. To be jealous of a poor little girl who has no father or mother, who has come among strangers at nine years old, and is fretting her poor little heart out for the sake of the father who loved her better than any one in all the world; to be jealous of her being taken out once when you know it is only on business they have gone--oh! for shame, Flossie! for shame!"

"Oh, well, she needn't fret after her pa so much," Flossie retorted, not taking Miss Clark's remarks to heart at all. "He didn't do so much for her. He wasn't a gentleman like Pa. If he had been, he'd have left her some money of her own."

Miss Clark's whole soul rose up in absolute loathing within her.

"You vulgar, vulgar child!" she thought. Aloud she said, "Flossie, my dear, a *lady* would not say such a thing as that. Your mother would be very, *very* angry if she heard it. Come, it is useless to stay grumbling and sulking here; you will have to accept the situation. Mrs. Stubbs is your mother, and the mistress of this house and family. She does not ask your leave whether she shall take you out with her

or not. She would be a very bad mother to you if she did, instead of being, as she is now, a very good one. Let me hear not another word, but put your things on to go out with me."

"Is Tom going?" Flossie inquired, not daring to refuse, though she would dearly have liked to do so.

"No. Tom and Johnnie are going out with Charles."

"And I have to just go out with you and three stupid girls?"

"With your three sisters, certainly."

"It's a beastly shame," Flossie burst out.

"Not another word," said the governess sharply. "Go and get ready at once."

And poor Flossie had to go. Of course it happened that as she began wrong at the beginning nothing went very well with her during the rest of the morning. Miss Clark went the one way she hated above all others; but Miss Clark had to do a small but important commission for Mrs. Stubbs, and was obliged to take it.

Then her sisters, whom she heartily despised--Tom being her favourite--annoyed her excessively. Janey would persist in lagging behind, and Minnie got a stone in her shoe and had to stop and take it off and shake out the pebble; and then, of course, she had to stop also to have her shoe tied again, and one or two people stopped to see what was amiss, as people do stop when they see any impediment to the general traffic in the London streets. "Making a perfect show of them all," Flossie said angrily.

And when they got home, Flossie not feeling quite so bad as when they set off, Mrs. Stubbs and May and "*that* Sarah" actually had not come back. It really was too bad, and Flossie sat down in the schoolroom window to watch for them with a face like a thunder cloud and a heart in which every outraged and injured feeling capable of being felt by weak human nature seemed to be seething and struggling at once.

If only Tom had come back, it would not have been so bad. But Charles, the indoor servant, had taken him and Johnnie down to Seven Dials to buy some guinea-pigs, and Seven Dials being a long way from South Kensington, they could not possibly have got back by that time if they had tried ever so. Poor Flossie!

So she sat and brooded--brooded over what she was pleased to call her wrongs. She would not so much have minded not going out with the "broom" if only she might have gone with Charles and Tom and Johnnie to enjoy the somewhat doubtful delights of Seven Dials. That, however, Mrs. Stubbs had resolutely and peremptorily refused to allow. So it happened that Flossie sat in the window waiting for their return.

At last they came. She saw them get out of the carriage and disappear within the house; she saw the carriage drive round to the stables.

And then there was a long pause. But they none of them seemed to think of

coming upstairs, even then. Poor Flossie kicked at the window-board more noisily than ever, and in vain Miss Clark, driven almost to desperation, cried, "Flossie, *will* you be quiet?"

And then the door opened quietly, and May came in, looking radiant. Flossie felt more ill-used even than before.

"Oh, you are here, Flossie. I've been looking for you *every*where," she remarked.

"Well, you can't have looked very hard, or you'd have found me," Flossie snapped. Then with a fierce glance at the parcel in her sister's hand, she blurted out, "You've been having ices!"

"Yes, we have," answered May; "but you needn't look like that, Flossie; I've brought you back a great deal more than both our ices cost."

"What have you brought?" half mollified.

"Caramels in chocolate."

"I hate caramels!" Flossie declared, fearing, with the old clinging to ungraciousness that sulky people have, that her last reply had sounded too much like coming round, a concession which Flossie never made too soon or made too cheap.

"Nougât?" said May, putting the caramels on one side.

"You *know* I can't eat nougât; it *always* makes my teeth ache!" Flossie cried.

"Fondants?" May knew that her sister was passionately fond of that form of sweetmeats. But Flossie would have none of it.

"I detest fondants!" she said, with an impressiveness which would have been worthy of the occasion had she said that she detested--well, prussic acid, or some pleasant and deadly preparation of that kind.

"Well, it's a pity I worried Ma for them at all," May remarked with her usual placid air of disgust. "Perhaps, though, you'll think differently after lunch. Come down, and pray don't look like that! Pa's at home."

CHAPTER IX

AN ASTUTE TELL-PIE

But not even the presence of Mr. Stubbs, who was held in great awe by his sons and daughters, and was most emphatically what is known as "master in his own house," was sufficient to restore the redoubtable Flossie to her usual careless, happy-go-lucky, giggling sauciness.

She went down and took her seat at table, speaking only when spoken to, but nevertheless contriving to eat an uncommonly good meal. And Tom entertained her with an account of his excursion to the Dials; and although Flossie had spent the last three hours in a passion of jealousy, envy, and unhappiness too great for alleviation, even when it came in the shape of caramels, nougât, and fondants, yet she could not resist the temptation of hearing all that Tom had to say, and of arranging to go round to the stables with him to see his new pets when lunch should be over.

And presently she was graciously pleased to accept the caramels and nougât and the fondants. But for some hours she did not forgive Sarah--"Princess Sarah" she unceasingly called her, although solemnly warned by May that "Ma" had already heard of the name, and that if "Pa" heard it the consequences would indeed be dreadful.

"Ah, I suppose Miss Tell-pie has been making up to Ma this morning!" suggested Flossie, with a frightful sneer.

"Nothing of the kind!" returned May quickly, but in her most condescending tone; "it was quite another person. Sarah has never said a word, not even when she was asked. But, any way, Ma did hear it, and she's very angry about it. And Ma says if Pa gets to know about it he'll be fearfully angry, for Sarah's ma was his favourite sister. And so you'd better just mind what you're doing, Miss Flossie!"

"I do hate that Miss Clark!" Flossie remarked.

"Miss Clark!" exclaimed May. "Why, whatever for?"

"Nasty, mean, spiteful tell-pie!" Flossie explained.

"It *wasn't* Miss Clark. I tell you Ma got to hear about it."

"Who was it then?"

"Ah, that I can't tell you; but, any way, Ma got to hear of it, and she told me to put a stop to it, and so you'd better be careful, that's all."

And never for a moment did Flossie suspect that some blades are so sharp that they can cut two ways, and that her informant was quite as clever at carrying tales to one side as to the other. Ah! but blundering, boisterous Flossie was not nearly so astute as Mrs. Stubbs's right hand--May.

When they had come from Bridgehampton Mrs. Stubbs had only brought her own box and one which contained Sarah's modest wardrobe with them. Her father's pictures and the precious Amati, with one or two bits of old carved oak, a chair, a table, a little chest, and a stool, with one or two bits of armour and a few pieces of very good china, were all packed and sent off by goods train.

They arrived that afternoon, and Mrs. Stubbs had them all unpacked, and declared her intention of putting them into the little bedroom which, after they came back from Brighton, should be Sarah's own.

"They're lovely things, and belong to the child herself, and it's right she

should have them kept for 'er, you know, Stubbs."

"Quite right, quite right," returned Mr. Stubbs promptly, and turning to see the effect of his wife's consideration on Sarah, whose character he was studying earnestly and diligently for the purpose of finding out whether any taint of what he called her "fine gentleman father" was about her.

But Sarah was quite oblivious. She had got hold of her beloved violin, from which she had never been parted before in all her life, and was dusting it jealously with her little pocket-handkerchief.

Mrs. Stubbs saw the look and understood it

"The child didn't 'ear," she explained; and having attracted Sarah's attention, told her what her plans were for her future comfort. "You'll like that, won't you?" she ended.

Sarah's reply was as astounding as it was prompt. "Oh, no, dear Auntie, not at all," she said earnestly.

"And why not?" Mrs. Stubbs inquired, while her husband stared as if he thought the world might be coming to an end.

"Why, Auntie, didn't you say your own self how beautiful they were, and how well they would set off a hall? I'd much rather you'd put them downstairs than in a bedroom, for you would see them every time you went in and out, and that *would* please me."

"There's unselfishness for you!" Mrs. Stubbs cried.

"No, Auntie. I don't think it is," said Sarah in her sweet, humble voice. "It's nothing so grand as unselfishness; it's just because I love you."

"Kiss me, my woman," cried Mrs. Stubbs with rapture.

"And come and kiss *me*," said Mr. Stubbs. "You're a good girl, Sarah, your mother's own daughter. She was right, my lass, to stick to the husband she loved and married, though I never thought so till this moment."

"Oh, Uncle!" Sarah gasped, for to hear him speak so of the mother she had never seen, but whom she had been taught to love from her babyhood, was joy almost greater than her child's heart could bear.

"There, there! If aught goes wrong, come to me," Mr. Stubbs murmured. "And if you always speak to your aunt as you've done to-day, I shall think your pore father must have been a fine fellow, or you'd never be what you are."

Oh, Sarah was so happy! After all, what could, what *did* it matter if Flossie and Tom did call her Princess Sarah of Nowhere? Why, just nothing at all--nothing at all.

"Uncle," she said, after a moment or two, "may I play you something on my violin?"

"Yes," he answered.

"That," remarked Mrs. Stubbs, as Sarah opened the piano and began to tune

up in a way which made her uncle open his eyes with astonishment, "is the fiddle Sarah says is worth five hundred pounds."

"Like enough. Some of 'em are," he answered.

And then Sarah played a German *lied* and a Hungarian dance; then "Home, Sweet Home."

"Well," said Mrs. Stubbs, looking at him, when she ceased, "what do you think of it?"

"I think she's--a genius," answered Mr. Stubbs.

CHAPTER X

A PLEASANT RAILWAY JOURNEY

On the Thursday following the whole Stubbs family went to Brighton. Sarah enjoyed the journey intensely, journeys being still almost a novelty with her. She would have enjoyed it more if May had not grumbled at going second-class, and if Flossie and Tom had not vied with one another in trying how far they could lean out of either window of the carriage. Poor Miss Clark was almost beside herself with fright.

"Tom, put your head in immediately," she cried in desperation, and expecting every moment to see the door fly open and Tom shoot out headlong, to be picked up a mangled corpse or in actual fragments. "Tom, do you hear me? Tom, I insist upon it."

But if Miss Clark had shouted till she had killed herself with shouting, Tom, leaning half his body out of the window, with the wind whistling in his ears and the roar and rattle of the engine and wheels all helping to deaden any such small sounds as that of a human voice, and that the voice of a weak and rather helpless woman, could not have heard her, and Miss Clark had no choice but, with May's help, to tug Tom in by the nether part of his garments. This done, she pulled up the window with a jerk.

[image]

Tom leaning half his body out of the window with the wind whistling in his ears.

"I forbid you to open that window again," she said with such severity that

even Tom was cowed, and sat meekly down with a somewhat sulky air.

Miss Clark had thus time to turn her attention to the other children, when, to her horror, she found that Flossie was not only emulating but far surpassing her brother, not contenting herself with leaning well out of the window, but was actually standing on the seat that she might push herself out the farther. To pull her in and put her down on her seat with a bump was the work of but a moment.

"If I have to speak to you again, Flossie," she said in accents of solemn warning, "I shall get out at the next station and take you to your father's carriage. I fancy you will sit quiet there."

Flossie thought so too, and sat quietly enough till the next station was passed; but after that May complained so bitterly of the closed windows and the horrid stuffiness of the carriage that Miss Clark's sternness relented a little, and she allowed the window beside which May was sitting to be let down. And the very fact of the window being open seemed to set all Tom's nerves, and muscles, and longings tingling. He moved about uneasily in his seat, kept dodging round to look sideways through the glass at the side, and finally jumped up in a hurry and pushed his head and shoulders through the window. In vain did Miss Clark tug and pull at him and his garments alike. Tom had his elbows out of the window this time, and, as he chose not to give way, not all the combined strength of Miss Clark and May, with such help as Sarah and Minnie could give, had the smallest effect upon him. At last Miss Clark, who, as I have said, was not very strong, sat down and began to sniff in a way which sounded very hysterical, for she really was horribly afraid some dreadful accident would happen long before they got to their destination. However, as the suspicious little sob was heard and understood by May, that young lady took the law into her own hands and administered a sharp corrective immediately.

"Tom," she shouted, "come in."

Tom did not hear more than that he was being shouted at, and, as a natural consequence, did not move. Whereupon May quietly reached up to the rack and fished out Tom's own, his very own, riding-whip, and with that she began to belabour him soundly.

It had effect! After half a dozen cuts, Tom began to struggle in, but May was a stout and heavily-set young lady, and as resolute in will as ever was her father, when she was once fairly roused. So she calmly held him by his neck and went on administering her corrective until she was utterly tired.

Then she let him go, and when he, blind with rage and fury, and vowing vengeance upon her, made for her, and would have fought her, she sprang up at the knob by which you can signal to the driver and stop a train, and threatened to pull it if he touched her.

And oh, Tom was angry! Angry--he was furious; but he was mastered.

For it happened that on the very day that he and Johnnie had gone with Charles to Seven Dials, he had asked Charles all about the alarm bell, by means of which trains may be stopped if necessary, and Charles had explained the matter in a clear and lucid way peculiar to himself--a talent which made him especially valuable in a home where there were boys.

"Why, Master Tom," he exclaimed, "you see that's a indicator. If you wants to storp the trayin you just pulls that knob, and it rings a bell on the engine somewhere, and the driver storps the trayin at once."

"Let's stop it," suggested Tom, in high glee at the prospect of a walk through a dark and dangerous tunnel.

It must be admitted that Charles's heart fairly stood still at the thought of what his explanation had suggested.

"Master Tom," said he, with a face of horror which was so expressive that Tom was greatly impressed by it, "don't you go for to do nothing of the kind! It's almost a 'anging matter is storping of trayins--useless like. If you was took ill, or 'ad a fit, or somebody was a-murdering of you, why, it would be all right; but to storp a trayin when there's naught wrong, is--well, I believe, as a matter of fact, it's seven years."

"Seven years--seven years what?" Tom asked, thinking the whole thing a grand joke.

"Prison," returned Charles laconically; "that is, if it was me. If it was you, Master Tom, it would mean reformatory school, with plenty of stick and no meat, nor no 'olidays. No, I wouldn't go for to storp no trayins if I was you, Master Tom."

"But we needn't say it was us that rang," pleaded Tom, whose fingers were just itching to ring that bell.

Charles laughed. "Lor! Master Tom, they're up to that game!" he answered. "Bless you! they 'ave a lot of numbers, and they'd know in a minute which carriage it was that rang. No, Master Tom, don't you go for to ring no bells and storp no trayins. I lived servant with a young fellow once as had had five years of a reformatory school, and the tales he used to tell of what went on there was enough to make your blood curdle and your very 'air stand on end--mine did many a time!"

"Which--your blood or your hair, Charles?" Tom inquired, with keen interest.

"Both!" returned Charles, in a tone which carried conviction with it.

Thus Tom had no further resource, when May vowed to ring the bell and stop the train if he touched her, but to sit down and bear his aches and his defeat in silence. But, oh, he was angry! To be beaten and beaten again by a girl! It was too humiliating, too lowering to bear. Yet poor Tom had to bear it--that was the

worst of it. So they eventually got to Brighton in safety.

CHAPTER XI

AUNT GEORGE

It would be hard for me to tell of all the joys and pleasures which Brighton gave to the Stubbs family and to Sarah in particular. To the younger of the Stubbs children all was joy and delight, though they had been there several times before; to Miss Clark it was rest and peace, because she was not much troubled with Tom; and Flossie, too, was allowed to go about with him and Johnnie a great deal more freely than she ever was at home. May--always Miss Clark's favourite--spent much of her time beside her, though she went shopping sometimes with her mother, and also driving. But, on the whole, Mrs. Stubbs did not give up very much of her time just then to her children.

For Mr. Stubbs was taking his holiday, and Mr. Stubbs was troubled with a threatened fit of the gout, and do with the sound of the children's racket and bustle he simply could not. He was often threatened with the gout, though the threatenings seldom came to anything more than temper. So, whilst they were at Brighton, Mrs. Stubbs--who was as good a wife as she was a mother--devoted herself to him, and left the children to take care of themselves a good deal.

Their life was naturally quite a different one to what it was in town. They had a furnished house in which they slept and took their meals, but which at other times they did not much affect--they had early dinner there, and a high tea at seven o'clock, at which they all ate like ravenous wolves, Sarah amongst the number. This was a very happy, free-and-easy meal; for, though Mr. and Mrs. Stubbs joined in the early dinner, and called it lunch, they did not go in for the high tea but invariably went to the Grand Hotel and had dinner there.

Oh, what happy, happy days they were! There was the early run out on the Parade or the Sea Wall before breakfast; then the delicious seaside breakfast, with fresh whitings every morning. There was the daily dip in the sea, and the daily donkey ride or goat-chaise drive. There was the ever new and delightful shingle, on which they played and skipped, and dug and delved to their hearts' content. There were the niggers, and the blind man who sang to his own accompaniment on a sort of hand-organ, and wore a smart blue necktie, and a flower in his button-hole. There was a sweet little child, too, wearing a big sun-bonnet, whom they

used to watch for every morning, who came with toddling three-year-old gravity with a penny for the niggers, to the infinite amusement of the bystanders.

"Here, black man."

"Thank you, my little Snowdrop," was the invariable reply of the nigger minstrel; and then the little wee "Snowdrop" would make a stately bow. The nigger would take off his hat with a bow to match it, and the little scene was over till the morrow.

Then there was the Aquarium, and the delightful shop, which they called "The Creameries," a little way past Mutton's; and once or twice they all, except Mr. Stubbs, went for a trip in the steamer, when Mrs. Stubbs took chief charge, and Miss Clark was so horribly ill that she thought she would have died.

And once Mr. and Mrs. Stubbs went to Newhaven, and thence to Dieppe, taking Tom with them--not at all because Tom wanted to go, but because May represented to her mother that neither she nor Miss Clark were feeling very well, and that without "Pa's" restraining influence she was sure Tom would not only worry them all to death, but would also incite Flossie into all manner of dreadful pranks, the consequences of which might be dire and terrible.

So Tom went with them over the water on to French soil, and May remarked, triumphantly, to the governess, "I've got rid of him, Miss Clark, so now we shall have a little peace, and enjoy ourselves."

And so they did. To be without Tom was like the enjoyment of the calm which comes after a storm; and they, one and all, with the exception of Flossie, enjoyed it to the full. Flossie was very much aggrieved at being thus deprived of her playfellow.

"It is too bad that Tom should have to go with Pa and Ma," she complained. "He won't have a soul to speak to or a boy to play with, or anything, except some stupid little French boy, perhaps, who can't speak a word of anything but gibberish. I call it a beastly shame. I suppose it's old Clark's doing, and that she was just afraid Tom would get an extra good time while they were away. Nasty old cat!"

"Miss Clark had no more to do with it than you had," May replied. "Ma chose to take him, and that's enough."

As Tom was actually gone, there was not the smallest use in grumbling. So Flossie, thus left idle, turned her attention upon Sarah. It is needless to say that very, very soon Flossie also began to tease her, and, in consequence, Sarah's life became more or less of a burden to her. In this way Sarah, who was a singularly uncomplaining child, crept nearer and nearer to Miss Clark and May, as there she was safe from Flossie's taunts and jeers; and it was in this way that some notice was taken of her by one of the great lights of the Stubbs family, Mrs. George Stubbs, the corn-factor's wife, who lived in great style at Brighton.

It happened that one morning Sarah and May were waiting for Miss Clark to come out with the younger children, when Mrs. George came slowly along in a bath-chair. As she passed by them she called to the man to stop. "Dear me, is that you, May?" she remarked; "how you've grown. Your papa and mamma came to see us the other day, but I was not at home. I was out."

"They have gone over to Dieppe," said May, "and Tom with them. This is our cousin, Sarah, Aunt George."

"Oh! is it? Yes, your mamma told me when she wrote last that she was coming to live with you. How do you do, Sarah?"

All this was uttered in a languid tone, as if, on the whole, life was too much trouble to be lived at all. Sarah had met with nothing of this kind in all her life before, and looked only impressed; in truth, she looked a good deal more impressed than she was, or rather she looked *differently* impressed to what she was, and Mrs. George Stubbs was pleased to be a little flattered thereby.

"You must come and have tea with me," she observed graciously to May. "I have not been able to get out except the day your mamma called--my unfortunate neuralgia has been so very trying. You may bring Sarah. Would you like to come to-night?

"Very much indeed, thank you, Aunt George," responded May.

"Very much indeed," echoed Sarah.

"Your cousins are, of course, all at school in Paris, and your uncle is in London, so we will have high tea at seven o'clock. Bring your music with you."

"Sarah plays the violin," said May, who hated playing in company herself. "She plays it beautifully. She's going to have lessons."

"Then bring your violin and let me hear you," said Mrs. George to Sarah; "it is a most stylish instrument."

"I will," said Sarah.

"Oh, is Flossie to come, Aunt George?" asked May, as they shook hands.

"Flossie? No. I can-*not* do with Flossie," replied Mrs. George, in a tone which was enough to remind May that the very last time they had visited their aunt, Flossie had been clever enough to break a beautiful Venetian glass, which was, as Mrs. George had remarked pathetically over the fragments, simply of priceless value.

CHAPTER XII

SARAH MAKES AN IMPRESSION

"What a shame!" said Flossie, when she heard of the invitation. "Just like the nasty old thing, to remember an accident that I couldn't help. Not that I care! I shall enjoy myself far better at home"; and Flossie caught hold of Minnie's arm, and stalked along the Parade as if she cared so little that she did not want to hear any more about that great lady, her Aunt George.

"What did you think of her?" May asked of Sarah.

"Is she very ill?" Sarah asked, thinking of the bath-chair and her aunt's languid wrists and tones.

"Ill?--no! Ma says she's a hy-po-chon-driac," returned May, pronouncing the long word in syllables. "That's fancying yourself ill when you ain't. See? But all the same, Aunt George is very stylish."

"She's not half so nice as Auntie," Sarah flashed out.

"No, she isn't! But she's a great deal stylisher than Ma is," May returned. "Didn't you hear the way she told the man to go on? 'Go-on-Chawles!'" and May leant back on the seat, slightly waved a languid hand, flickered her drooping eyelids, and gave a half-languid, half-supercilious smile.

It was a fine imitation of Mrs. George's *stylish* airs, and Sarah was lost in admiration of it.

"I wonder," she remarked presently, after thinking the question over, "I wonder if she eats her dinner like that; because, if she does, it must generally get cold before she has half finished it."

"Oh, Aunt's much too stylish to eat much," May explained. "She nibbles at this and picks at that. You'll see to-night."

And Sarah did see--saw that, in spite of her airs and her nibbling and her picking, Mrs. George contrived to put a good meal out of sight--quite as much as ever her sister-in-law could manage to do. That evening was also a new experience to Sarah; it was so much more stately than anything she had seen before.

Mr. and Mrs. George Stubbs lived in a very large house in a large square in the best part of Brighton. A resplendent footman received them when they got out of the cab--yes, they had a cab, though it was only a short way from their own house--and a solemn butler ushered them into Mrs. George's presence. She wore a tea-gown of soft yellow silk, with a very voluminous trailing skirt, and showers of white lace and broad yellow ribbons about it. It was a garment that suited the languid air, the quivering eye-lids, the weak wrists, and the soft, drawling voice to perfection.

The resplendent footman had relieved Sarah of her violin-case and carried it upstairs for her. Mrs. George motioned to it as he announced her visitors. "With great care, Chawles," and "Chawles" put it down on a chair beside the inlaid grand piano as if it were a baby and might squeal.

"How are you, dears?" Mrs. George said, giving each a limp and languid

[image]

"With great care, Chawles."

hand. "How oppressive the evening is!" Then to "Chawles," "Let tea be served."

Very soon tea was announced, and they went downstairs. It was all new to Sarah--the large, spacious dining-room, with its rich, costly art-furniture; the pretty round table, with flowers and pretty-coloured glasses, with quaint little figures holding trays of sweets or preserves, or wheeling barrows of tiny ferns or miniature palms.

And the board was well-spread, too. There was salmon, salad, and a boiled chicken covered with white, frothy sauce. There was an aspic jelly, with eggs and green peas, and certain dark things which May told her afterwards were truffles; and there were several kinds of sweet dishes, and more than one kind of wine.

To Sarah it was a resplendent feast--as resplendent as the gorgeous footman who stood midway between her chair and May's, only a little in the rear; the solemn butler keeping guard over his mistress, whom he served first, as if she had been a royal queen.

"Now you shall play to me," Mrs. George said to Sarah, when they had got back to the drawing-room again.

Sarah rose obediently

"What shall I play?" she asked.

"What *can* you play?" Mrs. George asked, in reply.

"Oh, a great many things," Sarah said modestly.

"Let Sarah play what she fancies," put in May, who had established herself in a low, lounging chair, and was fanning herself with a fan she had found on a table at hand with the closest imitation of Mrs. George she could manage; "she always plays the best then."

"Very well," Mrs. George said graciously. So Sarah began.

She felt that in all her life before she had never played as she played then. The influence of the luxurious meal of which they had just partaken was upon her. The exquisite coloured glass, the sweet-scented flowers, the smell of the fragrant coffee, the stately servants moving softly about with quiet footsteps and smooth gestures, each and all had made her feel calm and peaceful; and now the soft-toned drawing-room, with its plush and lace hangings, its delicate china, its Indian embroideries, and those two quiet figures lying back in the half light, making no movement except the slow waving to and fro of their fans, completed the influence. It was all food to Sarah's artistic soul, and she made the Amati speak

for her all that was passing through her mind. Mrs. George was spell-bound. She actually forgot to fan herself in the desire not to miss a single note. Nay, she did more, she forgot to be languid, and sat bolt upright in her chair, her head moving to and fro in time with Sarah's music.

"Why, child, you are a genius!" she exclaimed, as Sarah came to a close and turned her speaking eyes upon her for comment.

"That's just what Papa said," put in May, adjusting her language to her company.

"If you go on--if you work," Mrs. George continued, "your violin will be your fortune. You will be a great woman some day."

Sarah's great eyes blazed at the thought of it; her heart began to beat hard and fast.

"Do you really think so, Aunt George?" she asked.

"I really do. I am sure of it. But, child, your violin seems to me a very good one. Where did you get it?"

"Father gave it to me; it was his grandfather's," said Sarah, holding it out for inspection. "It is an Amati."

"It is worth five hundred pounds," said May, who was eminently practical, and measured most things by a pounds, shillings, and pence standard.

"Of course--if it is an Amati," murmured Mrs. George, becoming languid again. "But go on, my child. I should like a little more."

So Sarah played and played until the room grew darker and darker, and gradually the shadows deepened, until it was only by the lamps from the square that she could distinguish the outlines of the figure in the yellow sweeping robes.

It was like a shock when the door was gently opened and the footman came in, bearing a huge lamp with a crimson shade. Then the coffee followed, and before very long one of the servants came back, and said that the cab for the young ladies had come.

"You have given me great pleasure," said Mrs. George to Sarah; "and when Mrs. Stubbs comes back I must make an afternoon party, and Sarah shall play at it. I have not been so pleased for a long time." And then she kissed them both, and with "good-night" they left her.

"Won't Ma be pleased!" remarked May, with great satisfaction, as they drove along the Parade. "I shan't mind a bit her being vexed that Flossie wasn't asked. Really, Sarah, I never saw Aunt George so excited before. She's generally so die-away and all that."

But Sarah was hardly listening, and not heeding at all. With her precious Amati on her knee, she was looking away over the moonlit sea, thinking of what her aunt had said to her. "If you go on--if you work--your violin will be your fortune. You will be a great woman."

"I will go on; I will work," she said to herself. "If I can be a great woman, I will."

CHAPTER XIII

THE TURNING POINT OF HER LIFE

Mrs. George's opinion of Sarah's violin-playing proved to be the turning point of her life as a violin-player. A few days later, when Mr. and Mrs. Stubbs had returned from Dieppe, she gave a large afternoon reception, to which Sarah took her violin, and played--her best. And the visitors--elegant ladies and gentlemen--crowded round the child, and would have turned her head with praises, had it not been such a sensible little head that they had no sort of effect upon it.

"They talked such a lot," she said to her aunt afterwards, "that I felt frightened at first; but I found that they didn't really know much about it, for one of my strings got flat, and they praised that more than anything."

But her aunt, Mrs. Stubbs, was proud enough and elated enough for a dozen violin-players, and she stood beside Sarah, explaining who she was and how she was going to have lessons from the best master they could get, until Mrs. George felt sick to think that her grand friends should know "that dreadful woman" was a relation of hers.

"Sarah, my dear, Lady Golladay wishes you to play again. Something pathetic."

So Sarah tuned up again, and Mrs. Stubbs was silent.

"She *can't* talk when the child is playing," murmured Mrs. George to her husband. "Do take her down to have some tea or something, and keep her as long as you can--anything to keep her out of sight."

"All right," he answered, and immediately that Sarah's melody came to an end, followed by a burst of applause, he offered his arm to his sister-in-law, and begged her to go with him and have some refreshments.

This reception completely opened Mrs. Stubbs's eyes, and she went back to London strangely impressed with a belief that Sarah was not only a genius, but a new fashion. She gave a party, too--not an afternoon party, for she wanted her husband to be there, and he was never at home before six o'clock. No, it was not an afternoon, but an evening party, at which the elder children were all present, and at which Sarah played.

And then Sarah began with her violin lessons, and worked hard, very hard. Mrs. George wrote from Brighton that she would provide all the new music she required, and that her Uncle George enclosed a sovereign for herself.

So time went on. Sarah had two lessons a week, and improved daily in her playing. Tom went back to school, and Johnnie with him, and Flossie's turbulent spirit became a good deal subdued, though she never forgot to keep Sarah reminded that she was "Princess Sarah of Nowhere."

The weeks rolled into months, and months into years. Miss Clark went away and got married--to May's mingled sorrow and delight, and to Flossie's unfeigned and unutterable disgust--for Mrs. Stubbs chose a lady to fill her place, who was what she called "a strict disciplinarian," and Flossie had considerably less freedom and fun than she had aforetime. For Miss Best had not only a strong mind and a strong will, but also a remarkably strong body, and seemed able to be on the alert at all times and seasons. She had, too, not the smallest objection to telling tales in school or out of it. The slightest infringement of her rules was visited with heavy punishment in the form of extra lessons, and the least attempt to shirk them was reported to headquarters immediately. In fact, Miss Best was a power, a power to be felt and feared, and Flossie did both accordingly.

Of all her pupils, Sarah was Miss Best's favourite. In her she recognised the only worker. May was good-tempered, and possessed the blessing of a placid and dignified disposition; but May's capacity for learning was not great, and Miss Best soon found that it was no use trying to drive her a shade faster along the royal road to knowledge. She went at a willing jog-trot; she could not gallop because she had not the power. With Flossie it was different. Flossie had brilliant capacities which she would not use. Miss Best was determined that she should use them and exert them. Flossie was equally determined that she would not; and so for the first few months life in the Stubbs's schoolroom was a hand-to-hand fight between Flossie and Miss Best; and Miss Best came off winner.

Yet, though she got the better of Flossie and made her work, she never gave her the same place in her heart that she gave to Sarah, who worked with all her heart and soul, because she was impressed with the idea that if she only worked hard enough she might be a great woman one day.

And as she was a favourite with Miss Best, so was she a favourite with Signor Capri, the master who taught her the violin. He was quick to recognise the true artist soul that dwelt within her, and gave her all the help that lay in his power; in fact, Sarah was his favourite pupil, his pet, and he put many chances of advancement toward her great ambition in her way.

For instance, many times he took her out with him to play at concerts and private houses, so that she might grow accustomed to playing before an audience of strangers and also that she might become known.

[image]

Sarah was his favourite pupil.

And known very soon Sarah was, and welcomed to many a noble house for the sake of the exquisite sounds she was able to draw from the strings of the Amati. Besides that, Sarah was a very pretty child, and, as she grew older, was an equally pretty girl. She never had that gawky legginess which distinguishes so many girls in their teens--there was nothing awkward about her, nothing rough or boisterous. All her movements were soft and gentle; her voice was sweet, and her laugh very musical, but not loud; and with her tall, slim figure, and the great, grey, earnest eyes looking out from under the shining masses of sunny hair, she was, indeed, an uncommon-looking girl, and a great contrast to the young Stubbses, who were all short, and inclined to be stout, and had twine-coloured hair, and pale, pasty complexions; though, in spite of that, they all had, like their mother, a certain bonniness which made them pleasant looking enough.

Sarah had been nearly four years living at Jesamond Road, where Mrs. Stubbs's home was, when May "came out." May was then nearly eighteen, and just what she had been when Sarah first saw her--placid, good-tempered, and obliging, not very quick in mind, nor yet in body; willing to take advantage of every pleasure that came in her road, but not willing to give herself the smallest trouble that other people might have pleasure too. She was very different to Flossie, who was a regular little spitfire, and had neither consideration for, nor fear of, anything on earth, except Miss Best, whom she detested, but whom she dared not openly defy; if she had dared, Flossie would have done it.

As for Tom, he was beyond the control of anybody in that house, excepting his father. He was wilder, rougher, more unmerciful, and more impudent than ever; and whenever Tom's holidays drew near, Sarah used to quake for fear lest her precious Amati should not survive the visit; and invariably she carried it to the cupboard in Miss Best's room for safety. Happily, into that room Master Tom did not presume to put even so much as the tip of his nose.

CHAPTER XIV

A BRILLIANT MARRIAGE

When May left the schoolroom behind her, Sarah found a great difference in her life. In her placid, good-natured way, May had always been fond of her, and had in a great measure stood between her and Flossie; but Flossie, when she became the senior of the schoolroom, took every opportunity she had of making the younger ones, particularly Sarah, aware of that fact.

Sarah was then nearly fourteen, and rather taller than Flossie, who was turned sixteen; so, had she chosen to do so, she could easily have got the best of her; but Sarah never forgot--never, indeed, was allowed to forget--that she was not a daughter of the house, and was not, therefore, free to fight and wrangle as much and as disagreeably as the others allowed themselves to do.

Very, very often, in those days, did she have the old taunt of Princess Sarah thrown at her. "Oh! *Princess* Sarah is quite too high and mighty to quarrel over it. *Princess* Sarah is going to do the mute martyr style of thing."

So Flossie would--though she did not know it--encourage her cousin to work harder than ever, just by way of showing that she had something more in her than to spend her life in bickering and snarling. Stay! I do Sarah an injustice there--she was moved by another and a better motive, both in trying to keep peace and in trying to get on with her work, for she had always the grateful feeling, "It will please Auntie so," and always a feeling that it was a slight return to her uncle's wife if she bore Flossie's attentions without complaining.

They did not see much of May; all day she was in the drawing-room with her mother, if she was not out on some errand of pleasure. And at night, when the schoolroom tea was over, she used to come down for a minute and show herself, a vision of comeliness--for May was considered a great beauty in the Stubbs' set--in white or roseate airy garments, with hair crimpled and fluffy, feathers and flowers, fans and bangles, pearls and diamonds, and all the other necessaries for a young lady of fashion in her first season.

Some time previously Mr. Stubbs had made his wife a present of an elegant landau and a pair of high-stepping horses. But Flossie, to her disgust, found that her drives were no more frequent than they had been in the days of the one-horse "broom." Then her mother had not unreasonably declared herself unable to bear the stuffiness of a carriage full of people. Now May objected to any one going with them on the score of her dress being crushed and the unpleasantness of "looking like a family ark."

They had become very gay. Scarcely a night passed but they went out to some gay entertainment or other, and many parties were given at home, when the elder of the younger members of the family had the pleasure of participating in them.

Flossie was terribly indignant at being kept at home that May might have more room in the luxurious and roomy carriage.

"Just you wait till I come out, Miss May." She said one day, "and then see if your airs and graces will keep me in the background! The fact is, you're afraid to show off against me; you know as well as I do that, with all your fine dress and your finer airs, you are not half so much noticed as I am! And as for that Sarah----"

"Leave Sarah out of it!" laughed May; "she doesn't want to go."

"I'd soon stop it if she did!" growled Flossie.

It was really very hard, and Flossie thought and said so. But May was inflexible, and long before Flossie was ready to come out May became engaged to be married.

It was a very brilliant marriage indeed, and the entire family were wonderfully elated about it. True, the bridegroom was a good deal older than May, and was pompous to a degree. But then he was enormously rich, and had a great cheap clothes manufactory down the East End somewhere, and could give May bigger diamonds than anybody they knew. He had, too, a house in Palace Gardens and a retinue of silk-stockinged servants, in comparison with whom Mrs. George's footman at Brighton was a mere country clod.

So in time May was married--married with such pomp and ceremony that feelings seemed left out altogether, and if tender-hearted Mrs. Stubbs shed a few tears at parting with the first of all her brood, they were smothered among the billows of lace which bedecked her, and nobody but herself was any the wiser.

After this it became an established custom that Flossie should take May's place in the carriage; and it was not long before she managed to persuade her mother that it was time for her to throw off Miss Best's yoke altogether, and go out as a young lady of fashion.

Before very long Mrs. Stubbs began dearly to repent herself of her weakness; for Flossie, with her emancipation, seemed to have left her old self in the schoolroom, and to have taken up a new character altogether. She became very refined, very fashionable, very elegant in all her ideas and desires.

"My mother really is a great trial to me," she said one day to Sarah. "She's very good, and all that, you know; but she's so--well, there's no sort of style about poor mother. And it is trying to have to take men up and introduce them to her. And they look at her, don't you know, as if she were something new, something strange--as if they hadn't seen anything like her before. It's annoying, to say the least of it."

"Well, if I were you," retorted Sarah hotly, "I should say to such people, and pretty sharply, 'If my mother is not good enough for you, why, neither am I.'"

"But then, you see, I am," remarked Flossie, with ineffable conceit.

"You don't understand what I mean," said Sarah, with a patient sigh.

"*That's* because you're so bad at expressing yourself, my dear," said Flossie,

with a fine air of condescension. "It all comes out of shutting yourself up so much with that squeaking old violin of yours. I can't think why you didn't go in for the guitar--it's such a pretty instrument to play, and it backs up a voice so well."

"But I haven't got a voice," cried Sarah, laughing.

"Oh, *that* doesn't matter. Lady Lomys hasn't a voice either, but she sings everywhere--everywhere."

"Where did you hear her?" Sarah asked.

"Oh, well, I haven't heard her myself," Flossie admitted; "but then, that's what *everybody* says about Lady Lomys."

"Oh! I see," murmured Sarah, not at all impressed by the mention of her ladyship's accomplishments.

It happened not very long after this that the Stubbses gave a ball--not just a dance, but a regular ball, with every available room in the house cleared and specially decorated, with the balconies covered in with awnings, and with every window and chimney-shelf, every fireplace and corner, filled with banks of flowers or stacks of exquisite palms or ferns. The entire house looked like fairyland, and Mrs. Stubbs went to and fro like a substantial fairy godmother, who was not quite sure how her charms were going to work.

May came, with her elderly husband, from her great mansion in Palace Gardens, wearing a white velvet gown and such a blaze of diamonds that the mind refused to estimate their real value, and ran instinctively to paste. And Mrs. George, who was in town for "the season," came with her daughters, and languidly patronised everything but those diamonds, which she cheapened at once as being a little "off colour" and a "trifle overdone." Mrs. George herself had put on every single stone she was possessed of--even to making use of her husband's breast-pin to fasten a stray end of lace on the bosom of her gown; but that, of course, had nothing really to do with her remarks on her niece's taste--oh, no!

Flossie had a new dress for the occasion, of course; and she had coaxed a beautiful diamond arrow out of her father on some pretext or other. Sarah thought she had never seen her look so charming before, and she told her so; it was with a smile and a conscious toss of her head that Flossie received the information, and looked at herself once more in the glass of her wardrobe.

As she stood there, with Sarah, in a simple white muslin gown, watching her, a maid entered with a large white cardboard box.

"For Miss Flossie," she said.

The box contained a beautiful bouquet of rare and fragrant hothouse flowers, and attached to the stem was a small parcel. The parcel proved to contain a superb diamond bangle, and Flossie went proudly downstairs, wearing it upon her arm.

And that night it crept out among the young ones in the Stubbs' schoolroom

that Flossie was going to be married.

CHAPTER XV

A FAMILY CATASTROPHE

I am bound to say that Flossie's brothers and sisters (and Sarah) received the news of her approaching departure from her father's roof with unmixed feelings. Not a drop of sorrow was there to mar the cup of joy which the occasion presented to every one. Not a regret at the blank her going would cause leavened the general satisfaction at her happiness. And Flossie herself was the least sorrowful, the least regretful, and the most satisfied of all.

Like May, she was marrying well--that is to say, she was marrying money. But, unlike May's husband, who was old, her future lord and master was young--only five years older than herself. It is true he was not much to look at; but then, as Mrs. Stubbs remarked to her husband, that was Flossie's business. It was equally true that he was reputed to be a young scamp, with an atrocious temper; but then, as Tom said, that was Flossie's look-out, and decidedly Flossie was not without little failings of that kind--though why, if one bad-tempered person decides upon marrying another bad-tempered person, it is generally considered by the world to be all right, because the one is as bad to get on with as the other, it would be hard to say; perhaps it is on the principle of two negatives making an affirmative, or in the belief that two wrongs will make eventually a right; I cannot say. But, odd as it is, that is the very general opinion.

The engagement was an unusually short one. Indeed, the bride had barely time to get her things ready by the day, and a great part of her trousseau was not able to be ready before her return from her honeymoon. But still they never seemed to think of putting off the wedding for a single day, although it was fixed to take place just six weeks from the day of the ball, when the engagement had begun.

It seemed to Sarah, well used as she had become to seeing liberal expenditure, that at this time the entire family seemed to be spending money like water! May's wedding had been a very grand one, but Flossie's outshone it in every way--in the number of the bridesmaids, in the number of the guests, in the number of the carriages, and the servants, and the flowers, in the splendour of the presents and the dresses of the trousseau, nay, in the very length of the bride's train.

The presents were gorgeous! Mr. Stubbs gave his daughter a gold-mounted dressing-case and a cheque for a thousand pounds; Mrs. Stubbs gave a diamond star, and May a necklace of such magnificence that even Flossie was astounded when she saw it.

So Flossie became Mrs. Jones, and passed away from her old home; and when it was all over, and the tokens of the great feast and merry-making had been cleared away, the household for a few days settled down into comparative quietude.

Only for a few days, however. With the exception of Sarah, who was too deeply engrossed in her work to care much for passing pleasures, the entire family seemed to have caught a fever of restlessness and love of excitement. After ten days the bride and bridegroom returned, and there were great parties to welcome them. Every day there seemed some reason why they should launch out a little further, and yet a little further, and instead of the family being less expensive now that two daughters were married, the general expenditure was far more lavish than it had ever been before. They had a second man-servant and another maid, and then they found that it was impossible to get on any longer without a second "broom" horse for night-work.

They did, indeed, begin to talk about leaving Jesamond Road, and going into a larger house. The boys--Tom was just seventeen, and Johnnie only fifteen--wanted a billiard-room, and Minnie wanted a boudoir, and Mr. Stubbs wanted a larger study, and Mrs. Stubbs wanted a double hall. That change, however, was never made, although Mrs. Stubbs and Minnie had seen and set their hearts upon a mansion in Earl's Court at a modest rental of five hundred a year, which they thought quite a reasonable rent--for one awful night the senior clerk came tearing up to the door in a cab, with the horse all in a lather and his own face like chalk, and asked for the master.

[image]

And asked for the master.

The master and mistress were just going out to a great dinner-party at the house of Mrs. Giath, their eldest daughter, in Palace Gardens, but Mr. Stubbs came down and saw him in the study. They were shut up there together for some time, until Mrs. Stubbs grew impatient, and knocked several times at the door, with a reminder that they would be very late, and that May would not like to be kept waiting. And at last Mr. Stubbs opened the door and came out.

"Get my coat, James," he said to the servant; then, as he buttoned it, added,

"Mr. Senior will have a glass of wine and a biscuit before he goes. Good-night, Senior. See you in the morning."

"Lor, Pa!" exclaimed Mrs. Stubbs, as they rolled away from the door, "I thought something was the matter."

"No, my dear, only some important business Senior thought I ought to know about," he answered; and Mr. Stubbs that evening was the very light and life of his daughter's party.

But in the morning the crash came! Not that he was there to see it, though; for just as they reached home again, and he passed into his own house, Mr. Stubbs reeled and fell to the ground in all the hideousness of a severe paralytic seizure.

Nor did he ever, even partially, recover his senses; before the day was done he had gone out of the sea of trouble which overwhelmed him, to answer for his doings before a high and just tribunal, which, let us hope, would give him a more merciful judgment than he would have found in this world.

Mrs. Stubbs was broken-hearted and inconsolable. "If he had only been spared for a bit," she sobbed to her married daughters, who came to her in her trouble; "but to be taken sudden like that! oh, it is 'ard--it is 'ard."

"Poor Pa," murmured May; "he was so active, he couldn't have borne to be ill and helpless, as he would have been if he'd lived. I wouldn't fret so, if I were you, Ma, dear, I really wouldn't."

"There's nothing dishonourable," Mrs. Stubbs sobbed; "all's gone, but your poor Pa's good name's 'ere still. I do thank 'eaven for that--yes, I do."

"H'm! If Pa'd been half sharp," Flossie remarked, "he'd have taken care there was something left."

"He's left his good name and his good deeds behind him--that's better than mere money," said Sarah softly, holding her aunt's hand very tightly in both of hers.

"Oh, well, as to that, Sarah," said Flossie, "of course it isn't likely *you'll* blame Pa for being so lavish as he was; dressed just the same as us, and expensive violin lessons twice a week, and all that."

Mrs. Stubbs and May both cried out upon Flossie for her words.

"Cruel, cruel!" Mrs. Stubbs exclaimed; "when you've had every lux'ry you could wish, to blame your poor Pa for his charity before he's laid in his grave. I'm ashamed of you, Flossie, I am!" And then she hid her face on Sarah's slim young

shoulder, and broke into bitter sobs and tears.

CHAPTER XVI

A CHANGE OF CIRCUMSTANCES

When her husband's affairs were all investigated and arranged, it was found, to Mrs. Stubbs's great joy, that matters were scarcely quite so bad as had at first been anticipated. True everything--or what she called everything--was gone; but no stain was there to sully a name which had always been held among City men as a blameless and honourable one.

The actual cause of the crash had been the failure of a large bank, which had ruined two important houses with which the firm of Stubbs & Co. had very large dealings; these houses were unable to pay their debts to Stubbs & Co.; and Stubbs & Co., having been living in great extravagance up to the last penny which could be squeezed out of the business, were not able to stand the strain of the unexpected losses.

But when everything was arranged, it was found that, with careful nursing and management, the business could be carried on for the benefit of the children until such time as the boys should be of an age to take the management of it themselves. Meanwhile, the trustees took Tom away from the expensive public school at which he was at the time of his father's death, and, instead of sending him to Oxford, as his father intended to have done a few months later, put him into the clerks' department of a large mercantile house, where they made him work--as Tom himself said indignantly--as if he were a mere under-clerk at a few shillings a week.

It happened that the trustees were both bachelors, who understood the management of a large and expensive household just about as well as they sympathised with the desire for social prominence. Therefore, they believed themselves to be doing a really generous and almost unheard-of action when they agreed to allow Mrs. Stubbs three hundred a year out of the proceeds of the business. "And the lad will have his pound a week," they said to one another, as a further proof of their consideration for their old friend's widow.

But to Mrs. Stubbs it seemed as if the future was all so black that she could not even see where she was to get food for herself and her children. Poor soul! she had forgotten what the old friends of her dead husband remembered only too

well--the days when she had run up and down stairs after her mother's lodgers, of whom poor John Stubbs was one. On the whole, it is pretty certain that we rise much more easily than we fall. We find climbing up much easier than we find slipping down. And Mrs. Stubbs had got so used to spending twice three thousand a year, that to her a descent to three hundred seemed but very little better than the workhouse.

"A nice little 'ouse at Fulham!" she exclaimed, when Flossie tried to paint such a home in glowing colours. "You know I never could a-bear little 'ouses. Besides, 'ow am I to get them all into a nice little 'ouse? There's Sarah and me----"

"Oh, Sarah first, of course!" snapped Flossie.

"For shame, Flossie; you seem as if you don't know how to be mean enough to Sarah. I said 'er name first because she's my right 'and just now, and I lean on her for everything. There's Sarah and me, and Tom and Johnnie, and there's Minnie, and Janey, and Lily--that's seven. 'Ow am I to put seven of us away in what you call a nice little 'ouse?"

"Why, you'll have five bedrooms," Flossie cried.

"And where are the servants to go?" Mrs. Stubbs demanded. "Oh, I suppose I'm to do without a servant at all!"

"Well, I shouldn't think you'll want more than one," returned Flossie, who had six.

Mrs. Stubbs rocked herself to and fro in the depth of her misery and despair.

"And what's to become of me when Lily comes of age?" she cried.

For, by Mr. Stubbs's will, the business was to be carried on for the benefit of his children until the youngest should come of age, when the two boys were to have it as partners.

He had believed his wife and children were safely provided for out of his property, which had nothing to do with the business, of which Mrs. Stubbs was to take half absolutely, and the other half was to go equally among the children. Every penny of this had, however, been swallowed up by the losses which had in reality killed him; so that, though there was a provision for the children, Mrs. Stubbs was, except through the favour of the trustees, absolutely unprovided for.

"Oh, well, it's a good long time till then," Flossie returned coldly. "And really, Ma, I do think it's ungrateful of you to make such a fuss, when things might be so different. Just supposing, now, May and I weren't married; you might grumble then."

"I 'aven't as much," Mrs. Stubbs cried, "to bring up five children on as you and May each 'ave to dress on."

"Perhaps not; but then, we have to go into a great deal of society; and look what that costs," Flossie retorted. "Any way, Mr. Jones is too much disgusted at all this happening just now to let me help you. And as for my allowance, I have to

pay my maid out of it, so I really don't see that you can expect me to do anything for you."

"I don't think Auntie wants you to do anything for her; I'm sure she doesn't expect it," put in Sarah, who was so utterly disgusted that she could keep silence no longer, though she had determined not to speak at all.

"Well, Sarah, I really can't see what occasion there is for you to put your word in," said Mrs. Jones, with an air of dignity. "We have heard a great deal about what you were going to do; perhaps now you will do it, and let us see whether the princess is going to turn out a real princess after all or not."

For a moment Sarah looked at her with such utter disdain in her grey eyes that the redoubtable Flossie fairly quailed beneath her gaze.

"I am going always to treat my dear aunt with the respect and love she deserves, Flossie," she said gravely; "and, even if I prove an utter failure in every other way, you might still take a lesson from me with great improvement to yourself."

"Oh, you think so, do you?" sneered Flossie.

"Yes, I do," said Sarah promptly.

"Then let me tell you, Miss Sarah Gray, that I think your tone and manner exceedingly impertinent and familiar. In future, call me Mrs. Jones, if you please, and try if you can remember to keep your place."

"Mrs. Jones, I will; and do you remember to keep yours," Sarah replied; "and do you remember, too, that you need not insult my aunt any further."

"I shall speak as I like to my own mother," Flossie cried furiously.

Sarah opened her eyes wide.

"If I do put you out of the house, Mrs. Jones," she said, speaking with ominous calmness, "I may be a little rough with you." And then the door opened, and May came languidly in.

"What *is* the matter?" she cried. "Flossie, is that you--at it again? Do go away, please. I am not well. I came to have a little talk to Ma, and I can't bear quarrelling. Do go away, Flossie, I beg."

"That Sarah has insulted me," Flossie gasped--but May was remarkably unsympathetic.

"Oh, I've no doubt--a very good thing, too, for you've insulted her ever since you first saw her. Do go away. I'm sure I shall faint. I never could bear wrangling and fighting; and poor Pa's going off like that has upset me so--I just feel as if I could burst out crying if any one speaks to me."

On this, Flossie, finding that May was unmistakably preparing herself for a nice comfortable faint, went stormily away, and rolled off in her grand carriage, looking like a thunder-cloud. May recovered immediately.

"I really don't envy Flossie's husband the rest of his life," she remarked.

"What a comfort she has gone away! Well, Ma, dear, I came in to have a quiet talk with you, and that tiresome girl has upset you. I would not take any notice if I were you, dear. I don't suppose Flossie means it. But she is so impetuous, and she's so jealous of Sarah. I'm sure I don't know what you ever did to upset her, Sarah; but you and I were always the best of friends."

"The best of friends, May," said Sarah; then bent down and kissed her cousin's soft ungloved hand. "I didn't mean to speak, not to say a word--but she was so unkind to poor Auntie--and, May, it is hard on Auntie after all this"--looking round the room--"and her beautiful carriages and horses, and her kind husband who was so fond of her, to have just three hundred a year to keep five children on. It is hard."

Poor Mrs. Stubbs broke down and began to sob instantly. "Sarah puts it all so beautifully," she said. "That's just as it was--your poor Pa--and----" but then she stopped, unable to go on, choked by her tears.

"Now, Ma, dear, don't," May entreated; "we don't know why everything is. It might have been worse, you know, dear; just think, if you'd had Flossie at home."

"Ah! it is a comfort to me to think Flossie is married," said Mrs. Stubbs, drying her eyes; "she's never been like a child to me."

"And there might have been nothing, you know; after all there is something, and you'll be able to keep them all together. I shall help you all I can, Ma, dear; you know I shall do that! And if I can't do much else, I can take you for drives, and see if I can't help Minnie to get married. You'll think it queer, Ma, dear, that I'm not just able to say 'I'll give you a cheque for a hundred now and then.' But I can't. Life isn't all roses for me either. Of course I have a grand house in Palace Gardens, and diamonds, and carriages, and all that; but Mr. Giath doesn't give me much money; he isn't like poor dear Pa. Of course he made a very big settlement--Pa insisted on that--but only at his death. I don't get it now, and he pays my dress bills himself; and," with a sob, "I don't find it all roses to be an old man's darling. But I don't want to trouble you with all that, Ma, dear; you've got enough troubles and worries of your own. But you'll understand just how it is, won't you, dear? And, of course, there'll be many little ways that I shall be able to help you."

"Well, I have got my troubles," said Mrs. Stubbs, drying her eyes, and looking at her daughter's pretty flushed face; "but others has them as well. You were always my right 'and, May, from the time you was a little girl in short petticoats; and you're more comfort to me now than all my other children put together, all of them. Flossie's been 'ere turning up her nose at her mother and insulting Sarah shameful; and Tom's grumbling all day long at what he calls his 'beggarly screw'; and saying it won't pay for 'is cigars and cabs and such-like; and Minnie's been crying all this morning because it's her birthday and nobody's remembered it; and, really, altogether I feel as if it wouldn't take much more to send me off my head altogether."

"But I did remember it," cried May; "I've brought her a birthday present, poor child."

"I'm sure it is good of you, May," poor Mrs. Stubbs cried. "Minnie 'll be a bit comforted now. You know it is 'ard on her, for we used to make so much of birthdays. But neither she nor the little ones ever seem to think of what they've 'ad--and no more I do myself for that matter--only of what they 'aven't got. 'Pon my word, there is but one in the 'ouse to-day who hasn' 'ad their grumble over something or other, and that's Sarah."

Sarah laughed as she patted her aunt's fat hand. "I've got something else to do just now, Auntie," she said bravely. "I've got to put my shoulder to the wheel now. I've been riding on the top of the wagon all along."

CHAPTER XVII

SARAH'S OPPORTUNITY

A few days later they made the move to the little house at Fulham, which, in poor lavish Mrs. Stubbs's eyes, was but a degree better than a removal to the workhouse.

But Sarah--who somehow seemed to have naturally the management of everything--worked like a slave to get everything into good order before her aunt should set foot in the place at all. She turned the house in Jesamond Road out that she might take the prettiest and most suitable things for the little Queen Anne box to which they were going, and, with the help of Johnnie and the new servant, succeeded in having everything in perfect order by the time of Mrs. Stubbs's arrival.

But it was very, very small. Mrs. Stubbs looked hopelessly at the narrow passage and the narrower doorways when she entered, sobbed as she recognised one article of furniture after another, or missed such as Sarah had not thought it wise or in good taste to bring.

"Oh, dear, dear! I ought to think it all very pretty and nice," she wailed; "I left it all to you, Sarah, and I know you've done your best--I know it; but I *did* think I should have been able to keep my own inlaid market writing-table that Stubbs gave me on my last wedding-day--I did."

"Dear Auntie, you shall have it," Sarah explained, soothingly. "I couldn't get you to choose just what you would have, and I had to be guided by size a good

deal. But we can fetch the table easily enough; it will stand here in the window beautifully, and just finish off the room nicely."

"Flossie says she'll not be able to come and see us very often." Mrs. Stubbs wandered off again. "She says it knocks the carriage about so, coming down these new neighbourhoods. Ah, *I* never used to think of my carriages before my relations, never!"

"Flossie will have more sense by-and-by," said Sarah, who had but small patience with Mrs. Jones's airs and graces.

Poor Sarah was so tired of Flossie and her airs! To her mind, she was hardly worth a moment's consideration or regret; to her she was just an ungenerous, self-sufficient, very vulgar and heartless young person, who would have been more in her place had she been scrubbing floors or washing dishes than she was, or ever would be, riding in her own carriage behind a pair of high-stepping horses that had cost four hundred guineas.

"Don't think about Flossie at all, dear," she said to her aunt. "Some day she'll be sorry for all that has happened lately; perhaps some day she may have trouble herself, and then she will understand how unkind she has been to you. But May is always sweet and good, though she is tied up by that horrid old man, and can't help you as she would like; and the little ones are different--they would never hurt your feelings willingly."

Poor Mrs. Stubbs shook her head sadly. She had said nothing to Sarah, for a wonder--for as a rule she carried all her troubles to her--but only that morning Tom had flung off to "his beastly office" in a rage, because she had not been able to give him a sovereign and had suggested that the pound a week he was receiving ought to be more than enough for his personal expenses; and Minnie had pouted and cried because she could not have a pair of new gloves; and the little ones had looked at her in utter dismay because there was not a fresh pot of jam for their breakfast. Perhaps Mrs. Stubbs felt that Sarah was young, and must not be disheartened when she was doing her best; I know not. Any way, she kept these things to herself, and after shaking her head as a sort of tribute to her troubles, promised that she would try to make herself happy in her new home.

And then Sarah felt herself at liberty to go and pay a visit to Signor Capri, her violin master, one she had been wishing to pay ever since her uncle's death. She went at a time when she knew he would be alone, and indeed she found him so.

"Ah, my little Sara!" he cried; "I was hoping to see you again soon. And tell me, you have lost the good uncle, eh?"

"Yes, Signor," she answered, and briefly told him all the story of her uncle's misfortune and death. "And now," she ended, "I want to make money. They have done everything for me; now I want to do something for them. Can you help

me?"

[image]

"They have done everything for me; now I want to do something for them. Can you help me?"

"You are a brave child!" the violin-master cried; "and God has given you the rarest of all good gifts--a grateful heart. I think I can help you; I think so. Only this morning I had a letter from a friend who is arranging a concert tour; he has first-rate *artistes*, and he wants a lady violinist."

"Me!" cried Sarah excitedly.

"But," said the maestro, raising his hand, "he does not give much money."

"But it would be a beginning," she broke in.

"He gives six pounds a week."

"I'll go!" Sarah cried.

"Then we will go and see him at once; I have an hour to spare," said the Italian kindly.

Well, before that hour was ended, Sarah had engaged herself to go on a twelve weeks' tour, at a salary of six pounds a week and her travelling expenses; and before ten days more had gone over her head, she had set off on her travels in search of fame and fortune.

Flossie's remarks were very pious. "I'm sure, Sarah," she said, setting her rich folds of crape and silk straight, "I am heartily glad to find that you have so much good feeling as to wish to relieve poor Ma of the expense of keeping you. How much happier you will be to feel you are no longer a burden on anybody! There's nothing like independence. I'm sure every time I think of poor Ma, I say to myself, 'Thank Heaven, *I'm* no burden upon her!"

"That must be a great comfort to you, I'm sure, Flossie," said Sarah gravely.

"Yes; I often tell Mr. Jones so. And what salary are you going to have, Sarah?"

"Enough to help my aunt a little," replied Sarah coldly.

"Well, really, I can't see why you need be so close about it," Flossie observed, "nor why you should want to help Ma. I'm sure she'll have enough to live very comfortably, only, of course, she must be content to live a little less extravagantly than she did before. I do believe," she added, with a superb air, "in people being content and happy with what they have; it's so much more sensible than always pining after what they haven't got. By the bye, Sarah, we are going to have a dinner-party to-morrow night; I couldn't ask Ma because of her mourning, but if

you like to come in in the evening, and bring your violin, we shall be very pleased, I'm sure."

"If you like to ask me as a professional, and pay my fee," began Sarah mischievously.

"Pay your fee! Well, I never! To your own cousin, and when you owe us so much!" Flossie exclaimed.

"I don't think I owe *you* anything, Flossie, not even civility or kindness," said Sarah coldly; but Mrs. Jones had flounced away in a huff.

"Such impudence!" as she said to her husband afterwards.

Well, Sarah went off on her tour, and won a fair amount of success--enough to make her manager anxious to secure her for the following winter on the same terms. But Sarah had promised Signor Capri to do nothing without his knowledge, and he wrote back, "Wait! Before next winter you may be famous."

But the months passed over, and still fame had not come, except in a moderate degree. The manager was very glad to take Sarah on tour again at a salary advanced to seven pounds a week instead of six, and Sarah was equally glad to go.

In the meantime, she had made a good deal of money by playing at private houses and at concerts. She had taken a well-earned holiday to the Channel Islands, and had given her aunt and the little ones a very good time there, all out of her own pocket, and had added a very liberal sum to the housekeeping purse of the little Queen Anne house at Fulham.

Twice she had dined with the Giaths in Palace Gardens, and had taken her violin because May had not asked her to do so. And more than once she had been asked to go in the evening to grace the rooms of Mrs. Jones--an honour which she persistently declined.

So time went on, and Sarah worked late and early, hoping, longing, praying to be one day a great woman.

Thus several years went by, and at last there came a glad and joyous day when she received a command to play at a State concert--a day when she woke to find herself looked upon as one of the first violinists of the age. It was wonderful, then, how engagements crowded in upon her; how she was sought out, flattered, and made much of; how even the redoubtable Flossie was proud to go about saying that she was Miss Gray's cousin.

Not that she ever owned it to Sarah; but Sarah heard from time to time that Mrs. Jones had spread the fact of the relationship abroad. The object of Flossie's life now seemed to be to get Sarah to play at her house; for, as she explained to her mother and May--now a rich young widow--"Of course it looks odd to other people that they never see Sarah at my house, and I don't wish to do Sarah harm by saying that I don't care to have her there. But sometimes when she's staying

with you, May, you might bring her."

"I don't think she would come," laughed May. "You see, you sat upon Sarah so frightfully when she wasn't anybody in particular, that now, when she is somebody of more consequence than all the lot of us put together, she naturally doesn't feel inclined to have anything to do with you. I know I shouldn't."

"And Lady Bright asked particularly if she was going to play on the 9th," said Flossie, with a rueful face, and not attempting to deny the past in any way.

"And what did you say?"

"I said I hoped so."

"Oh, well, that will be all the same. Lady Bright will understand after a time that 'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick.'" May laughed. "And perhaps it will be as well to remember in future that ugly ducklings may turn out swans some day, and that if they do, they are sometimes painfully aware of the fact that some people would have kept them ducklings for ever. You see, you and Tom, who is more horrid now even than he was as a boy--yes, I see you agree with me--gave her the name of Princess Sarah! She has grown up to the name, that is all."
THE END

Miss Mignon

It was a week before Christmas. There were no visitors at Ferrers Court, although a couple of days later the great hall would be filled to overflowing with a happy, light-hearted set of people, all bent, as they always were at Ferrers Court, on enjoying themselves to the uttermost.

The weather was cold and cheerless, though not cold enough to stop the hunting, and Captain Ferrers had been absent all day, and might now come home at any moment. Mrs. Ferrers was, in fact, rather putting on the time, hoping he might return before Browne brought in the tea. The children meantime were clamouring loudly for a story.

"A story?" said Mrs. Ferrers doubtfully; she never thought herself very good at story-telling, and often wondered that the children seemed to like hearing her so much.

"Yes, a story," cried three or four fresh young voices in a breath.

"I'm afraid I've told you *all* my stories," Mrs. Ferrers said apologetically. "And I have told them all so many times."

"Tell us about Mignon," cried Maud, for Mignon, their half-sister, was still their favourite heroine.

Mrs. Ferrers pondered for a moment. "I don't believe," she remarked, "that I have ever told you about Mignon being lost."

"Mignon--lost!" cried Maud. "Oh! never."

"Lost!" echoed Pearl. "And where was she lost, Mother?"

"Tell us," cried Bertie.

"Yes; do tell us," echoed Cecil.

"Tell us," cried Madge and Baby in the same breath.

So Mrs. Ferrers gathered her thoughts together and began.

"It was when Pearl was about four months old"--at which Pearl drew herself up and looked important, as if she, too, had had a share in the adventure--"we went to London for the season. That was in April. We had not the house we have now, for that was let for a term, so your father took a house near the top of Queen's Gate."

"That's where the memorial is," said Pearl. "I know."

"Yes; we know," echoed Maud.

"Well, Humphie, who had attended Mignon ever since she was a year old, had, of course, the entire care of Pearl, and I engaged a very nice French maid--half-maid, half-nurse--for Mignon. She was under Humphie, of course, but she had to take Mignon out--not very often, for she was accustomed to going out a great deal with your father--and to dress her, and so on.

"Well, one day your father and I were going to a large afternoon party where we couldn't very well take Mignon. We stayed rather late, rushed back and dressed and went to a dinner-party, not really having time to see the children at all. We had a party or two later on, but to them we never went, for just as we ladies were going through the hall on our way up into the drawing-room, I caught sight of Browne at the door of the inner hall. I turned aside at once.

"'Is anything the matter, Browne?' I asked. Indeed, I saw by his white face that something dreadful had happened.

[image]

"'Is anything the matter, Brown?'" (Page 141)

"'Oh, yes, ma'am, something dreadful!' he answered. 'I scarcely know how to tell you. Miss Mignon is lost.'

"'Miss Mignon lost, Browne! What do you mean?' I said. 'How can she be lost?'

"'I only know she is,' he said, in a shaking voice. 'That silly idiot Hortense went out with her about three o'clock, with orders to go into the Park. She--this is her story, I cannot vouch for the truth of it, ma'am--she admits that she took her first to look at the shop-windows in the High Street, and that then she thought she would like to go into the Gardens, and that while there she fell asleep. The afternoon being so warm, she sat on a bench asleep till half-past five, and when she woke up with a start, feeling very shivery and cold--and serve her right, too!--Miss Mignon was gone; there was not a trace of her to be seen.'

"'If the silly creature had come straight home,' Browne went on, 'something might have been done; but instead of doing that, she must go into hysterics--with nobody to see her, even!--and then go crying about from one gate to the other, wandering about, as if Miss Mignon would be likely to be sitting on the edge of the pavement waiting for her. At last--I suppose when she began to get hungry'--Browne went on savagely, 'she bethought herself of coming home, and there she landed herself at nine o'clock, and has been steadily going out of one faint into another ever since. I have sent James round to the police station,' he said, 'but I thought I had better come straight away and fetch you, ma'am.'

"Well," Mrs. Ferrers went on, "I said good-night to our hostess and sent for your father, and we went back at once. We were five miles from home, and it was half-past eleven when we got there. And there was no trace of Mignon. James had taken a cab and gone round to all the police stations within reach of the house, and Humphie was waiting for us, shaking like a leaf and as white as death, and at the sight of us Hortense went off into wild hysterics again and shrieked till--till--I could have shaken her," Mrs. Ferrers ended severely.

"Well, your father and I just stood and looked at one another. 'Where can she be?' I said. 'Can't you get any information out of Hortense? Surely the woman must know where she was last with her.'

"But, as your father said, the Gardens were all deserted and closed hours ago. She was not at all likely to be there. Almost without doubt she had strayed out into the busy street, had then found herself in a strange neighbourhood, and--and I simply shuddered to think what might have happened to her after that.

"For the time we were helpless; we did not know, we could not think what to do next. A policeman came up from the nearest station as we stood considering what we should do. But he had no news; he shook his head at my eager inquiry. 'No, madam,' he said, 'I'm sorry we have no news of the little lady; but we telegraphed to all the stations near, but no lost child has been brought in. She must have fallen in with some private person.'

"As you may imagine," Mrs. Ferrers went on, "I felt dreadfully blank--indeed,

your father and I simply stood and looked at one another. What should we, what could we do next? To go out and search about the streets at nearly midnight would be like looking for a needle in a truss of hay--we could not send a crier out with a bell--we were at our wits' end. Indeed, it seemed as if we could do nothing but wait till morning, when we might advertise.

"Then just as the policeman was turning away, another policeman came and knocked at the door. A little girl had been taken into the police station at Hammersmith, a pretty fair-haired child about six years old, who did not know where she lived, and could not make the men there understand who she was.

"'That's not Miss Mignon,' cried Humphie indignantly; 'Miss Mignon knows perfectly well who she is and who she belongs to. That's never Miss Mignon.'

"'Ah, well, Humphie,' said your father, 'Miss Mignon has never been lost at dead of night before; it's enough to frighten any child, and though she's as quick as a needle, she's only a baby after all.'

"The carriage was still at the door, and we went down as quickly as the horses could go to Hammersmith, feeling sure that we should find Mignon there, frightened and tired, but safe. And when we got there the child wasn't Mignon at all, but a little, commonly-dressed thing who didn't seem even to know what her name was. However, its mother came whilst we were there, and scolded her properly for what she called 'running away.'

"I couldn't help it," Mrs. Ferrers went on. "I was in such trouble, wondering what had got Mignon, and I just spoke to her straight. 'Oh,' I said, 'you ought only to be thankful your little girl is safe and sound, and not be scolding the poor little frightened thing like that. How can your speak to her so?'

"'Well,' she said, 'if you had seven of them always up to some mischief or other, and you'd been running about for hours till you were fit to drop, and you hadn't a carriage to take her home in, I daresay you'd feel a bit cross, too.'

"And I felt," Mrs. Ferrers went on reflectively, "that there was a great deal in what she said. They didn't live more than a mile off, and it was our way back, so we drove them home, and the little girl went to sleep on her mother's knee; and I told her what trouble we were in about Mignon. She was quite grateful for the lift, and I promised to let her know if we found Mignon all right.

"Well, we reached home again, and there wasn't a sign of Mignon anywhere. With every moment I got more and more uneasy, for Mignon was turned six years old, and was well used to going about and seeing strange people. I knew she wasn't a child to get nervous unduly, or be frightened of any one who offered to take care of her, only I was so afraid that the wrong sort of people might have got hold of her, and might have decoyed her away for the sake of her clothes or a reward.

"Oh, dear, what a dreadful night it was! Your father went out and got a cab and went round to all the police-stations, inquiring everywhere for traces of her.

And then he went and knocked up all the park-keepers, but none of them had noticed her either.

"And Humphie and I sat up by the nursery fire; and about two in the morning, Hortense crept down and went on her knees to me, praying and imploring me to forgive her, and saying that if anything had happened to little missie, she would make away with herself."

[image]

"Hortense crept down and went on her knees to me, praying and imploring me to forgive her."

"What's that?" asked Madge suddenly.

"Hanging herself," answered Pearl. "Judas hanged himself."

"Judas went out and hanged himself," corrected Maud, who had a passion for accuracy of small details.

"Yes, of course, but that doesn't matter," said Pearl. "The hanging was the principal thing. He could have hanged himself without going out, but going out without hanging himself would not have been anything."

"Go on, Mother," cried a chorus of voices. "What happened next?"

"Well, nothing happened for a long time," Mrs. Ferrers replied. "We all stayed up; I think nobody thought of going to bed that night at all--I know Humphie and I never did--and at last the morning broke, and your father and Browne began to make arrangements for putting notices in all the papers, and when they had written them all, they went off in the grey dim light to try to get them put into that day's papers. Oh! it was a most dreadful night, and a terrible morning.

"I didn't like to put it into words, but all night long I had thought of the Round Pond, and wondered if my Mignon was in there. I found out afterwards that your father had thought of it too, and had made all arrangements for having it dragged, though he wouldn't speak of it to me, because he fancied I had not thought of it.

"And over and over again Humphie kept saying, 'I'm sure my precious lamb knows perfectly well who she is and all about herself. I'm sure of it. Why, we taught her years ago, ma'am, in case it ever happened she got lost. "I'm Miss Mignon, and I belong to Booties," and "Captain Ferrers, the Scarlet Lancers." She knew it all, years since.'

"'Yes, but, Humphie, has any one taught her 304, Queen's Gate, S.W.?' I asked.

"'No,' said Humphie. 'I can't say that we have.'

"'Then she might fall in with hundreds and thousands of people in London who wouldn't know Captain Ferrers from Captain Jones; and she might be too frightened to remember anything about the Scarlet Lancers. It isn't as if we were with the regiment still.'

"The morning wore on; nothing happened. Your father went to Scotland Yard, and detectives came down and examined Hortense, who went off into fresh hysterics, and threatened to go right away and drown herself there and then; but there was no news of Mignon. And then Algy came in and told me they had dragged the pond, and, thank God, she wasn't there; though the suspense was almost unbearable as it was.

"But we seemed no nearer to hearing anything of her, and hardly knew what to be doing next, though the day was wearing away, and it was horrible to think of going through such another night as the one we had just passed.

"And then--just at four o'clock--a handsome carriage drew up at the door, and I heard Mignon's voice: 'Yes, I'm sure that's the house,' she said.

"Oh! I don't know how I got to the door; I think I tore it open, and ran down the steps to meet her. I don't remember what I said--I think I cried. I'm sure your father nearly choked himself in trying to keep his sobs back. We nearly smothered Mignon with kisses, and it was ever so long before we had time to take any notice of the strange lady who had brought her home.

"'I'm afraid you've had a terrible night,' she said, with tears in her eyes. 'I found your dear little maid wandering about in South Kensington--oh! right down in Onslow Gardens. I saw that she was not a child accustomed to being out alone, and I asked her how it was. She was perfectly cool and unconcerned.

"'"I've lost my maid," she said. "She sat down on a seat, and I was picking daisies, and I don't know how, but I couldn't find her again."

"'"And what is your name?" I asked her.

"'"Oh! I'm Miss Mignon," she answered.

"'"And where do you live?" I inquired.

"'"Well, that's just what I can't remember. When I'm at home I live at Ferrers Court, and when we were with the regiment, our address was, "The Scarlet Lancers"--just that. But now we are in Town, I *can't* remember the name of the street. I thought when I lost Hortense that I should know my way back, but I missed it somehow. And Mother will be so uneasy," she ended.

"'Well,' said the lady, 'I told her she had much better come home with me, and that I would try to find out Captain Ferrers; and so I did, but without success. Then it occurred to me that as soon as the offices were open I would telegraph to the Scarlet Lancers, asking for Captain Ferrers' address. And so I did; and when the answer came back, it was your country address--

"CAPTAIN FERRERS, *Ferrers Court,* *Farlington, Blankshire.*"

"'So I had no choice but to telegraph to Ferrers Court for your town address. And oh, dear lady! my heart was aching for you all the time, for I knew you must be suffering agonies," she ended, holding out her hands to me.

"And so, of course, I had been," Mrs. Ferrers went on; "but 'all's well that ends well'; and we at once taught Mignon the name of the house she lived in, and, indeed, for a long time we sewed a little ticket on to the hem of her frock, so that if she did forget it, she would easily make some one understand where she wished to be taken."

"And Hortense--what did you do with her?" Pearl asked.

"Oh! we gave her a month's wages, and sent her away," Mrs. Ferrers answered; "and now here is Browne with the tea, Pearl. Can you manage it?"

"Oh! yes, Mother," Pearl answered. She was nearly fourteen, and loved to make the tea now and then. "Oh! here's Miss Maitland coming! Miss Maitland, *I* am to pour out the tea. Mother says so."

"Willingly, so long as you don't scald yourself," said Miss Maitland, smiling.

"And here is Father," cried Maud. "Bootles, Mother has been telling us the dreadful story of how Mignon was lost."

"Has she, sweetheart? Well, we don't want to go through that particular experience any more, do we, darling?"

"No! once was once too often," said Mrs. Ferrers, slipping her hand into his.

"Two lumps of sugar," said Pearl, bringing her father his cup.

"And muffins!" added Maud.

Boy's Love

PART I

It was towards the close of the afternoon of a warm June day that a short, sturdy, fair-haired boy, wearing a dark blue uniform with a touch of scarlet here and there about it, sat down at a long desk to write a letter. It was headed, "Duke of York's School, Chelsea, S.W.," and began, "My dear Mother."

When he had got thus far, the boy paused, leaned his elbow upon the desk, and rested his head upon his hand. And then after a minute the hand slipped downward, and rubbed something out of his eyes--something hard to get rid of,

apparently--for presently one bright drop after another forced its way through his fingers and fell on to the desk beneath.

And yet, truth to tell, even those bright drops did not help to get rid of the something, the something which had a firm foothold in the heart below, making it swell till it was well-nigh to bursting. This was his letter:--

"My DEAR MOTHER,--This is my last day at school. To-morrow I am going to Warnecliffe to join the 25th Dragoons; they call them the Black Horse. I am very glad to leave school and be a soldier like my father, but,"--and here the blurred writing was an evidence of the trouble in the boy's heart--"but I don't like losing my chum. You know, he is Tom Boynton, and we have been chums for more than three years. He is orderly to the dispenser, and has leave to go out almost any time. I am very fond of him, and haven't any other chum, though he has another chum besides me. I think he likes me best. I do love him, mother; and I lay awake all last night crying. Tom cried, too, a little. He is going to the Scarlet Lancers, and I don't know when I shall see him any more. I wish we were going into the same regiment.

"I got your letter on my fourteenth birthday, the day before yesterday. Tom is seven months older than me. He would have left school before if he had not been orderly to the dispenser. We both got the V.G. Jack Green is going into my regiment. I shall come home when I get my furlough--and if Tom gets his at the same time, can I bring him too? Tom hasn't any father or mother at all. This is a very long letter. I hope you are very well.

"I am your affectionate son, EDWARD PETRES."

He read the letter over, brushing his cuff across his eyes when he came to that part of the paper which showed traces of tears, and then he folded it and directed the envelope, after which he had finished. Then he got up, took his cap, and with the letter in his hand, went forlornly out of the large room.

When he had got rid of it, he went in search of his chum, Tom Boynton, whom he met just coming away from his last service as "Dispenser's Orderly" with a heaving chest and eyes almost as red and swollen as poor Ted's own.

Ted turned back with him and took hold of his arm.

"Taken your last physic out, Tom?" said he, with a gallant attempt at manly indifference to the dreaded parting of the morrow.

"Aye," returned Tom in a choking voice and with eyes carefully averted.

The dispenser had just bade him "good-bye," and had told him in wishing him "God speed" that he was very sorry to lose him, and would most likely have to wait a long time before he again had help as efficient; and then he had given him a tip of half-a-crown, and had shaken hands with him. So Tom's heart was quite as full as Ted's, and of the two, being the older and bigger and stronger, he was far the most anxious to hide the emotion he felt.

"Have you seen Jack?" he asked, giving his head a bit of a shake and crushing his trouble down right bravely.

"Jack Green?" asked Ted shortly. He was not a little jealous of Jack Green, who was his chum's other chum.

"Aye! Where is he?"

"I haven't seen him--not all the afternoon," returned Ted curtly.

"I'll go and find him," said Tom, disengaging his arm from Ted's close grasp.

The two lads parted then, for Tom swung away in the direction of the play-ground, leaving Ted staring blankly after him; and there he stood for full five minutes, until, his eyes blinded with pain, he could see no longer, and then he turned away and hid his face upon his arm against a friendly sheltering wall.

[image]

Hid his face upon his arm against a friendly sheltering wall

But by-and-by his jealousy of Jack Green began to wear away. Perhaps, after all, he argued, Tom only wanted to hide his trouble. Tom was a big lad, and was even more ashamed than Ted of being betrayed into weeping and such-like exhibitions of weakness. So, by the time they turned in for the night--the last night--Ted had forgotten the pain of the afternoon.

"Tom," said he, going over to his chum's bed, which was next to his, "Tom, I've come to talk to you."

"Yes," whispered Tom in reply. The lights were all out then, and most of the boys were fast asleep, so big Tom drew his chum's head down to his, and put his arm round his neck.

"It's the last night, Tom," said Ted in a strangled voice.

"Yes," said Tom, in a whisper.

"We've been chums for three years and more," Ted went on, "and we've never been out of friends yet. P'raps I shall get an exchange to your reg'ment yet."

"Or me to yours," answered Tom eagerly.

"I shan't have no chum now," Ted went on, taking no notice of Tom's words.

"You'll have Jack Green," said Tom.

"Yes, there'll be Jack Green, but he ain't you," Ted answered mournfully. "He'll never be my chum like you was, Tom; but if ever I've a chance of doing him a good turn, I will, 'cause *you* liked him."

"Will you, Ted?" eagerly.

"Yes, I will," answered Ted steadily. "And, Tom, it's our last time together to-night--we mayn't ever get together again."

"I know," sighed Tom.

"I wish," Ted said hesitatingly--"oh, Tom," with a sorrowful catch in his voice and a great gulp in his throat, "I--I--do wish you'd kiss me--just once."

And so Tom Boynton put his other arm around his chum's neck, and the two lads, who had been friends for three years, held one another for a minute in a close embrace; an instant later Ted Petres tore himself away and sprang into his bed, dragging the clothes over his head, and burying his face in the pillow in a vain attempt to stifle his sobs. And before another day had gone over their heads they had parted, to meet again--when--and where?

PART II

Seven years had gone by. A fierce and scorching sun shone down with glaring radiance upon long stretches of arid and sandy country, covered sparsely with coarse rank grass and brushwood--the country which is called the Soudan; the country where so many brilliant lives ended, sacrificed in the cause of a crusade as hopeless as the crusade of the children--who sought to win Heaven with glory where the flower of the nations had failed--sacrificed to the death in the too late attempt to succour a gallant soldier, the noble victim of an ignoble policy.

And between the brilliant glaring sky and the sun-scorched arid earth, there hung a heavy cloud of gunpowder smoke while the flower of two races fought desperately for conquest. In the midst a square of British troops, with set white faces and sternly compressed lips, with watchful eyes well on the alert, and in each brave heart the knowledge that the fight was for life or death. And on all hands swarms of stalwart Soudanese, reckless of life and counting death their chiefest gain, shouting on Allah and the prophet to aid them, and dying happy in the certain faith of entering paradise if but one Christian dog should fall to their hand.

Oh, what a scene it was! Only a handful of men at bay, while mass after

mass of the enemy came down upon them like the waves of the incoming tide upon the sea shore; and as at times a rock-bound coast gives way and falls before the encroaching advances of the ocean, so that ill-fated square gave way before the overwhelming numbers of the soldiers of the Prophet, and in a moment all chance for our men seemed over.

Ay; but the British lion can up and fight again after he has had a roll over which would crush the life out of most of his foes. And so that day, by sheer hard desperate fighting, the square closed up and was formed again, and of all the enemy who had dashed into the midst of it, not one lived to tell the tale.

But, oh! what though the enemy fell half a score to one? How many a brave life was laid down that day, and how many a bullet had found its billet was proved by the shrieks of agony which rose and rang above all the tumult of the fight.

It happened that our old friend, Ted Petres, no longer a short and sturdy boy but a fine-grown young fellow of one-and-twenty now, found himself not very far from the place where the square had been broken--found himself fighting hard to win the day and check the mad on-rush of the sons of the Prophet. As the ranks closed up once more, he, as did most others who were in the rear, turned his attention to the seething mass of blacks thus trapped, and to his horror saw his comrade, Jack Green, down on his knees, striking wildly here and there against the attacks of three Soudanese. Quick as thought--the thought that this was the first time he had ever had a chance of fulfilling his last promise to his boy's love, Tom--Ted flew to his aid, sent one shouting gentleman to paradise, and neatly disabled the right arm of a second just as the third put his spear through poor Jack's lungs.

To cleave him to the teeth was but the work of a moment, and Ted Petres accomplished it before the follower of the Prophet had time to withdraw his spear! but, alas! poor Jack's life was welling out of him faster than the sands run out of a broken hour-glass! It was no use to lift him up and look round for help; Jack Green had seen his last service, and Ted knew it. But he did his best for him in those last moments, and help came in the person of one of their officers, one D'Arcy de Bolingbroke who, though badly wounded in the arm himself, was yet able to lend a hand.

"Petres, you're a splendid fellow," he exclaimed. "I shall recommend you if we live to get out of this. You ought to get the Cross for this."

"Thank you, sir," returned Ted gratefully.

And then between them they managed to get the poor fellow to the doctors, who were hard at work behind a poor shelter of wagons and store-cases. But it was too late, for when they laid him down Jack Green was dead and at ease for ever.

One of the hospital orderlies turned from a case at hand, and Ted uttered a

cry of surprise at the sight of him. "Why, *Tom*!" he cried, starting up to take his hand, "I didn't even know you were with us."

There was no answering gleam of pleasure on Tom Boynton's face; he stared at Ted, stared at the face of the dead man lying at their feet, then dropped upon his knees beside him. "Oh, Jack, Jack, speak to me," he cried imploringly.

[image]

"Oh, Jack, Jack, speak to me," he cried imploringly.

"It's too late, Tom," said Ted, bending down. "I did my best, but it was too late, old man. I did my best."

Tom Boynton looked up in his old chum's face. "You let him die?" he asked.

"We were three to one," returned the other humbly.

"You did your best, and you let him die," repeated Tom blankly. "And he was my chum," he added miserably.

"Tom," cried Ted passionately, "I was your chum too."

"*You!*" with infinite scorn; then bending down he kissed the dead face tenderly.

Ted Petres turned away, blind with pain. He might have won the Cross, but he had lost his friend--the friend who had loved him less than that other chum of whom he had not the heart now to feel jealous.

And that was how they met again--that was the end of Tom Petres' boy's love.

Yum-Yum: A Pug

CHAPTER I

For a pug Yum-Yum was perfect, and let me tell you it takes a great many special sorts of beauty to give you a pug which in any way approaches perfection.

First, your true pug must be of a certain colour, a warm fawn-colour; it must have a proper width of chest and a bull-doggish bandiness about the legs; it must have a dark streak from the top of its head along its back towards the tail; it must have a double twist to that same tail, and three rolls of fat or loose skin, set like a collar about its throat; it must have a square mouth, an ink-black--no, no, a soot-

black mask (that is, face) adorned with an infinitesimal nose, a pair of large and lustrous goggle-eyes, and five moles. I believe, too, that there is something very important about the shape and colouring of its toes; but I really don't know much about pugs, and this list of perfections is only what I have been able to gather from various friends who do understand the subject.

So let me get on with my story, and say at once that Yum-Yum possessed all these perfections. She may have had others, for she was without doubt a great beauty of her kind, and she certainly was blessed with an admirable temper, an angelic temper, mild as new milk, and as patient as Job's.

And Yum-Yum belonged to a little lady called Nannie Mackenzie.

[image]

Yum-Yum: A Pug.

The Mackenzies, I must tell you, were not rich people, or in any way persons of importance; they had no relations, and apparently belonged to no particular family; but they were very nice people, and very good people, and lived in one of a large row of houses on the Surrey side of the river Thames, at that part which is called Putney.

Mr. Mackenzie was something in the city, and had not apparently hit upon a good thing, for there was not much money to spare in the house at Putney. I rather fancy that he was managing clerk to a tea-warehouse, but am not sure upon that point. Mrs. Mackenzie had been a governess, but of course she had not started life as a teacher of small children; no, she had come into the world in an upper room of a pretty country vicarage, where the olive branches grew like stonecrop, and most visitors were in the habit of reminding the vicar of certain lines in the hundred and twenty-seventh Psalm.

In course of time this particular olive plant, like her sisters, picked up a smattering of certain branches of knowledge, and, armed thus, went out into the wide world to make her own way. Her knowledge was not extensive; it comprised a fluent power of speaking her mother-tongue with a pleasant tone and correct accent, but without any very well-grounded idea of why and wherefore it was so. She also knew a little French of doubtful quality, and a little less German that was distinctly off colour. She could copy a drawing in a woodenly accurate kind of way, with stodgy skies made chiefly of Chinese white, and exceedingly woolly trees largely helped out with the same useful composition. At that time there was no sham about Nora Browne's pretensions to art--there they were, good, bad, or indifferent, and you might take them for what they were worth, which was not

much. It was not until she had been Mrs. Mackenzie for some years that she took to "doing" the picture-galleries armed with catalogue and pencil, and talked learnedly about *chiar-oscuro*, about distance and atmosphere, about this school and that, this method or the other treatment. There were frequenters of the art-galleries of London to whom Mrs. Mackenzie, *née* Nora Browne, was a delightful study; but then, on the other hand, there was a much larger number of persons than these whom she impressed deeply, and who even went so far as to speak of her with bated breath as "a power" on the press, while, as a matter of fact, Mrs. Mackenzie's little paragraphs were very innocent, and not very remunerative, and generally won for the more or less weekly society papers in which they appeared a reputation for employing an art-critic who knew a good deal more about the frames than about the pictures within them.

However, all this is a little by the way! I really only give these details of Mrs. Mackenzie's doings to show that the family was, by virtue of their mother being a dabbler in journalism, in touch with the set which I saw the other day elegantly described as "Upper Bohemia."

Now in the circles of "Upper Bohemia" nobody is anybody unless they can do something--unless they can paint pictures or umbrella vases and milking-stools, unless they can sing attractively, or play some instrument beyond the ordinary average of skill, unless they can write novels or make paragraphs for the newspapers, unless they can act or give conjuring entertainments, or unless they can compose pretty little songs with a distinct *motif*, or pieces for the piano which nobody can make head or tail of. It is very funny that there should be so wide a difference necessary between the composition of music for the voice and music for the piano. For the first there must be a little something to catch the ear, a little swing in the refrain, a something to make the head wag to and fro; the words may be ever so silly if they are only bordering on the pathetic, and if the catch in the refrain is taking enough the rest of the song may be as silly as the words, and still it will be a success. But with a piece it is different. For that the air must be resolutely turned inside out, as it were, and apparently if the composer chances to light on one or two pretty bits, he goes back again and touches them up so as to make them match all the rest. It seems odd this, but the world does not stop to listen, but talks its hardest, and as at the end it says "How lovely!" I suppose it is all right.

But all these people stand in the very middle of "Upper Bohemia," and, as a pebble dropped into the water makes circles and ever-widening circles on the smooth surface, so do the circles which constitute "Upper Bohemia" widen and widen until eventually they merge into the world beyond! There are the amateurs and the reciters, and the artists who put "decorative" in front of the word which denotes their calling, and then put a hyphen between the two! And there

are the thought-readers, and the palmists, and the people who have invented a new religion! All these are in the ever-widening circles of "Upper Bohemia." And outside these again come the fashionable lady-dressmakers and the art-milliners, the trained nurses and the professors of cooking. After these you may go on almost *ad libitum*, until the circle melts into professional life on the one hand and fashionable life on the other.

You have perhaps been wondering, my gentle reader, what all this can possibly have to do with the pug, Yum-Yum, which belonged to a little girl named Nannie Mackenzie. Well, it really has something to do with it, as I will show you. First, because it tells you that this was the set of people to whom the Mackenzies belonged and took a pride in belonging. It is true that they had a stronger claim to belong to a city set; but you see Mrs. Mackenzie had been brought up in the bosom of the Church, and thought more of the refined society in "Upper Bohemia" than she did of all the money bags to be found east of Temple Bar! In this I think she was right; in modern London it does not do for the lion to lie down with the lamb, or for earthenware pipkins to try sailing down the stream with the iron pots. In "Upper Bohemia," owing to the haziness of her right of entry, Mrs. Mackenzie was quite an important person; in the city, owing to various circumstances--shortness of money, most of all--Mrs. Mackenzie was nowhere.

Mrs. Mackenzie had not followed the example of her father and mother with regard to the size of her family; she had only three children, two girls and a boy--Rosalind, Wilfrid, and Nannie.

At this time Nannie was only ten years old, a pretty, sweet, engaging child, with frank blue eyes and her mother's pretty trick of manner, a child who was never so happy as when she had a smart sash on with a clean white frock in readiness for any form of party that had happened to come in her way.

Wilf was different. He was a grave, quiet boy of thirteen, already working for a scholarship at St. Paul's School, and meaning to be a great man some day, and meanwhile spending all his spare hours collecting insects and gathering specimens of fern leaves together.

Above Wilf was Rosalind, and Rosalind was sixteen, a tall, willowy slip of a girl, with a pair of fine eyes and a passion for art. I do not mean a passion for making the woodenly accurate drawings with stodgy clouds and woolly trees which had satisfied her mother's soul and made her so eminently competent to criticise the work of other folk--no, not that, but a real passion for real art.

Now the two Mackenzie girls had had a governess for several years, a mildly amiable young lady of the same class, and possessed of about the same amount of knowledge as Mrs. Mackenzie herself had been. She too made wooden drawings with stodgy clouds and woolly trees, and she painted flowers--such flowers as made Rosalind's artistic soul rise within her and loathe Miss Temple and all her

works, nay, sometimes loathe even those good qualities which were her chiefest charm.

Rosalind wanted to go further a-field in the art world than either her mother's paragraphs or Miss Temple's copies; she wanted to join some well-known art-class, and, giving up everything else, go in for real hard, grinding work.

But it could not be done, for, as I have said, money was not plentiful in the house at Putney, and there was always the boy to be thought of, and also there was Nannie's education to finish. To let Rosalind join an expensive art-class would mean being without Miss Temple, and Mrs. Mackenzie felt that to do that would be to put a great wrong upon little Nannie, for which she would justly be able to reproach her all her life long.

"It would not do, my dear," she said to Rosalind, when her elder daughter was one day holding forth on the glories which might one day be hers if only she could get her foot upon this, the lowest rung of the ladder by which she would fain climb to fame and fortune; "and really I don't see the sense or reason of your being so anxious to follow art as a profession. I am sure you paint very well. That little sketch of wild roses you did last week was exquisite; indeed, I showed it to Miss Dumerique when I was looking over her new art-studio in Bond Street. She said it would be charming painted on a thrush's-egg ground for a milking-stool or a tall table, or used for a whole suite of bedroom or boudoir furniture. I'm sure, my dear, you might make quite an income----"

"Did Miss Dumerique *offer* to do one--to let me do any work of that kind for her?" Rosalind broke in impatiently.

"No, she did not," Mrs. Mackenzie admitted, "but----"

"But, depend upon it, she is at work on the idea long before this," cried Rosalind. She knew Miss Dumerique, and had but small faith in any income from that quarter, several of her most cherished designs having *suggested* ideas to that gifted lady.

"If I only had twenty pounds, twenty pounds," Rosalind went on, "it would give me such a help, such a lift I should learn so much if I could spend twenty pounds; and it's such a little, only the price of the dress Mrs. Arlington had on the other day, and she said it was so cheap--'Just a cheap little gown, my dear, to wear in the morning.' Oh! if only I had the price of that gown."

"Rosalind, my dear," cried Mrs. Mackenzie, "don't say that--it sounds so like envy, and envy is a hateful quality."

"Yes, I know it is, but I do want twenty pounds so badly," answered Rosalind in a hopeless tone.

Mrs. Mackenzie began to sob weakly. "If I could give it to you, Rosalind, you know I would," she wailed, "but I haven't got it. I work and work and work and strain every nerve to give you the advantages; ay, and more than the advantages

that I had when I was your age. But I can't give you what I haven't got--it's unreasonable to ask it or to expect it."

"I didn't either ask or expect it," said Rosalind; but she said it under her breath, and felt that, after all, her mother was right--she could not give what she had not got.

It was hard on them both--on the girl that she could not have, on the mother that she could not give! Rosalind from this time forth kept silence about her art, because she knew that it was useless to hope for the impossible--kept silence, that is, from all but one person. And yet she could not keep her thoughts from flying ever and again to the art-classes and the twenty pounds which would do so much for her. So up in the room at the top of the house, where she dabbled among her scanty paints and sketched out pictures in any colours that she happened to have, and even went so far in the way of economy as to utilize the leavings of her mother's decorative paints--hedge-sparrow's-egg-blue, Arabian brown, eau de Nil, Gobelin, and others equally unsuitable for her purpose,--Rosalind Mackenzie dreamed dreams and saw visions--visions of a great day when she would have paints in profusion and art-teaching galore. There was not the smallest prospect of her dreams and visions coming true, any more than, without teaching and without paints, there was of her daubs growing into pictures, and finding places on the line at the Academy and the New. It is always so with youth. It hopes and hopes against hope, and when hope is dead, there is no longer any youth; it is dead too.

"There are youthful dreamers,
Building castles fair, with stately stairways;
Asking blindly
Of the Future what it cannot give them."

CHAPTER II

But there was one person to whom Rosalind Mackenzie poured out all that was in her mind,--that was her ten-year-old sister, Nannie. In Nannie she found a ready and a sympathetic listener; moreover, in Nannie's mind there was no doubt, no hesitation in believing that if Rosalind only had that twenty pounds there would be nothing to keep her back, nothing to prevent her sailing on right ahead into

the roseate realms of fame and glory! If only she had that twenty pounds!

Now Nannie undoubtedly had a very gay and jovial disposition. She was always ready for fun and excitement, and had no tendency or any desire to carve out a line for herself, as her brother and sister had both had before they had reached her age. Yet she had what was better in many people's eyes, a very tender heart and a very affectionate nature; and her tender heart was wrung and wrung again at the thought of her sister's unsatisfied longings and the great future that was being blighted, all for the want of twenty pounds.

Yet what could a little girl of ten years old do towards getting such a sum as that together? Just nothing! Why, if the sum was shillings instead of pounds, she would still find it utterly beyond her power and out of her grasp! She thought and she thought, but thinking did not help matters! She lay awake at night puzzling her little brain, but that did no good, and Nannie's face grew a good deal paler, and set her mother wondering if the house was unhealthy, or thinking that perhaps the air from the river was damp and injurious.

It was about this time that Yum-Yum, the pug which had been given to Nannie by one of her mother's friends two years before, suddenly became the person of the most importance in the household at Putney; for behold one fine morning when Nannie came down to breakfast, Yum-Yum presented her with three babies, three dear wee pugs, which sent Nannie into ecstasies and made her forget for a few days all about Rosalind's unsatisfied longings, and her craving after higher things than at present were attainable to her.

"You think they're real beauties, don't you, Father?" said Nannie anxiously.

"Yes, they are great beauties," said Mr. Mackenzie, holding one little snub-nosed pug up and examining it closely.

"And what should you think that they are worth, Father?" Nannie asked.

"Worth? Oh! that would depend a good deal on how they turn out. Their pedigree is a very fair one; and at the end of six weeks or two months they might be worth three or four guineas apiece--more, for that matter."

Nannie fairly gasped, and she clutched hold of her father's arm. "Oh! daddy dear," she exclaimed, "do you really, really think I might be able to get *any* thing like that for them?"

"Oh! yes, I think so," he answered, smiling at her earnestness. "But, Nannie, why do you want this money so much? Have you set your mind on a watch and chain?"

"Oh! no, dear daddy," she answered eagerly, "it's not for myself at all; it's poor Rosalind I'm thinking of"--and forthwith she poured into her father's surprised but sympathetic ear all the story of Rosalind's artistic longings, her craving for better art-lessons, for all the good things that may be had for the sum of twenty pounds.

Long before the story came to an end Mr. Mackenzie had drawn his little daughter very closely to him, and I fancy he was thinking, when she came to the end of it, more of the goodness of his Nannie's heart than of the greatness of Rosalind's future.

"My Nannie," he said tenderly, "my generous, kind-hearted little woman! Rosalind ought to love you dearly for----"

"Rosalind does love me dearly, daddy," Nannie explained; "only she can't help wanting to be a painter--it's in her, you know, and it's choking her. And Rosalind doesn't know a word about it. She wouldn't want me to sell Yummy's pups for her. Only you know, daddy, we can't keep three dogs besides Yummy; and we may just as well sell them as give them away, and then Rosalind would be able to have *some* of the lessons that she wants so badly."

Mr. Mackenzie smiled at Nannie's voluble information. "Well, well, you shall sell the pups and make Rosalind happy," he said; then after a moment added, "You know, Nannie, that I am not rich--in fact, I am very poor, but I will make the sum up to ten pounds, and Rosalind can go on thus far, at all events."

Well, a few weeks passed over, and the secret was rigidly kept between Mr. Mackenzie and Nannie. More than once Mrs. Mackenzie grumbled at the expense and the trouble Yummy's three babies were in the kitchen, and one afternoon when she came in from Town, she said--"Oh, Nannie, Lady Gray would like to have one of Yummy's puppies. I told her I thought you would let her have first choice."

"Then her ladyship must pay five guineas for it, my dear," said Mr. Mackenzie promptly. "Nannie and I are going to sell the puppies this time."

Mrs. Mackenzie rather lifted her eyebrows. "Oh! if that is so," she said, "of course Lady Gray must stand on one side. But what are you going to do with the money, Nannie? Buy yourself a watch?"

"No, Mother, but----" and Nannie looked anxiously at her father, who quickly came to the rescue, and evaded the question--which at that moment was an awkward one, for Rosalind was present.

It is probable that Mr. Mackenzie gave his wife just a hint of what was a-foot, for she asked no more questions about the puppies, and made no further complaints of the extra food and milk which Yummy required at this time.

And in due course, after a good deal of correspondence through the columns of the *Queen* and the *Exchange and Mart*, one by one the three little pugs went away from the house at Putney to homes of their own, and Nannie in return became the proud possessor of no fewer than eight golden sovereigns.

To these Mr. Mackenzie added the two which he had promised to make up the sum of ten pounds, and then Nannie had the supreme joy of going to Rosalind--who was hard at work in her studio painting a sunset in tints so startling that

her artist soul was sick within her--and flinging her offering in a shower into her lap.

"Why, what is this, Nannie?" Rosalind cried, half frightened.

"It's your lessons, Rosie," Nannie cried, "or at least as much of them as you can get for ten pounds; and I'm so glad, dear, dear Rosie, to be able to help you, you don't know," and happy Nannie flung her arms round her sister, almost crying for joy.

"But where did you get it? Oh, the pugs! I forgot them," Rosalind cried. "Oh! but Nannie, my dear, darling, unselfish sister, I can't take your money in this way----"

"You must," Nannie answered promptly.

"But your watch--you've longed so for a watch, you know," said the elder girl.

"Well, I have, but I can long a bit more," returned Nannie philosophically. "I shall like it all the better when I do get it."

"I *can't* take it, darling," Rosalind urged.

"Oh! yes, you can, if you try," continued Nannie. "And as for my watch, why, when you are a great swell painter you can buy me one--a real beauty--and I shall like it *ever* so much better than any other one in all the world."

Rosalind clasped Nannie close to her heart.

"My Nannie, my Nannie," she cried, "I shall never be as brave and helpful as you are. While I have been grumbling, and growling, and railing at fate, you have been putting your shoulder to the wheel, and----. Oh! Nannie, Nannie, it is good of you! It is good! I shall never forget it. The first penny I earn, dear, shall be yours; and I will never forget what my dear little sister has done for me, never--never, as long as I live."

A few days after this Rosalind was hard at work in the studio of the artist for whose teaching she had longed for so many weary months. And how she did work!

"I have one pupil who *works*," her maestro got into the habit of saying. "Some of you have a natural gift; you have a correct eye, and you have firm touch. Every one of you might make progress if you tried. But there is only one of you all who works. That is Miss Mackenzie."

But, all too soon, Rosalind's ten pounds melted away, until they had all gone. And, as there was no more where they had come from, Rosalind's lessons must also come to an end!

"Oh! Mother, can't you do *any*thing to help Rosie?" Nannie cried in piteously beseeching accents the night before Rosalind was to go to the studio for the last time.

"Nannie," answered Mrs. Mackenzie reproachfully, "don't you think I would

if I could?"

"Daddy, can you do nothing?" Nannie implored.

"My little one, I am so poor just now," he answered.

So poor Nannie went to bed in bitter disappointment for her sister's trial. She felt that it was very, very hard upon Rosalind, who had worked almost day and night that she might profit by every moment of the time she was at the studio. Yes, it was very, very hard.

However, Rosalind was brave, and put a good face upon the matter.

"Don't worry about it, my Nannie," she said just before she got into bed. "After all, I've learnt a great deal while I have been able to go to Mr. Raymond, and perhaps, after a time, daddy may be able to help me to go again, and I may do some work that will sell, and then I shall be able to go again. So don't worry yourself, my darling, for you can't help me this time. You see, Yummy hasn't got any more pups to sell."

But Nannie had got an idea, and all through the hours of that long night it stayed with her with the pertinacity of a nightmare. Still, whatever it was, she did not say a word about it to Rosalind, and when Rosalind looked round for her when she was ready to start for the studio in the morning, she was nowhere to be seen.

"Where is Nannie?" she asked.

"Oh! she's out in the garden," Mrs. Mackenzie answered.

"Well, I haven't time to go down; but don't let her worry about me, will you, Mother?" said Rosalind anxiously.

"No, no; I will look after her," Mrs. Mackenzie answered vaguely.

So Rosalind went off fairly satisfied.

"I have come for my last lesson, Mr. Raymond," she said, with rather an uncertain smile, as she bade the maestro good-morning.

"Oh! well, well; we must have a talk about that," he answered good-naturedly.

Rosalind shook her head a little sadly, and took her place without delay--to her every moment was precious.

But, though this was her last lesson, she was not destined to do much work that day, for, as soon as she opened her little paint-box, which she had taken home the previous day that she might do some work in the early morning, she saw lying on the top of the paints a little note, addressed in Nannie's round child's hand to "Rosalind."

The next moment maestro and pupils were alike startled by the sight of Rosalind Mackenzie with her face hidden in her hands, sobbing as if her heart would break.

"My dear child," cried the maestro, running to her side, "how now! What is

the matter? Pray tell me, my dear, tell me."

[image]

"'My dear child, what is the matter?'"

Then little by little Rosalind sobbed out the whole story--how she had longed and pined for these lessons, how her little sister Nannie had sacrificed herself to help her, and then at last she put into the maestro's hand the little note which she had brought from home in the paint-box.

"Darling Rosalind," the maestro read aloud, "I thought of a way to help you last night, but I did not tell you about it, because I know you would stop it. You know that Mrs. Clarke, who bought Yummy's little son, said she would give ten guineas for her any day, so I'm going to get Father to take her there this afternoon, and you shall have the money. I don't think I shall mind parting with her much.--NANNIE."

Mr. Raymond took off his glasses and wiped them.

"Upon my word," he muttered in an uncertain voice; "upon my word!"

"The darling!" cried one pupil.

"Is she fond of the dog?" asked another.

"Fond of her!" Rosalind echoed; "why, Yummy is the very idol of her heart. She has had her from a puppy; it would break the child's heart to part with her. Why, I would die," she said passionately, "before I would let her do it. I would go out as a charwoman, and scrub floors for my living all the days of my life, rather than do such a mean thing. Mr. Raymond," she went on, "I must go back at once, or I may be too late. I must lose my lesson--I can't help that. But I must go back--for, look at the poor little letter; all tears and----" and there Rosalind broke down into tears and sobs again; but, all the same, she gathered her brushes together, and began to pack up all her belongings.

The maestro stood for a moment in deep thought, but, as Rosalind put her hat on and resolutely dried her eyes, he spoke to the others who were standing around.

"I should very much like to see this out," he said, "and, if you will set me free this morning, I will give you each an extra lesson to make up for the interrupted one to-day. What do you say?"

"Yes! yes!" they all cried.

So the old painter and Rosalind went back to the house at Putney together, and at the door Rosalind put an eager question to the maid who opened it for them.

"My mother?" she asked.

"Mrs. Mackenzie is dressing to go out, Miss Rosalind," the maid answered.

"And Miss Nannie?"

"I believe Miss Nannie is in the garden," was the reply.

So Rosalind led the maestro out into the garden, where they soon espied Nannie curled up in a big chair, with Yummy in her arms. She did not notice their approach; indeed, she was almost asleep, worn out by the violence of her grief at the coming parting with Yummy, and was lying with her eyes closed, her cheek resting against the dog's satin-smooth head.

Rosalind flung herself down upon her knees before the chair, and took child and dog into her arms.

"My own precious little sister, my unselfish darling," she cried; "as if I would let you part with the dear doggy for my sake! I couldn't, Nannie, my dear, I couldn't--I couldn't part with Yummy myself. But I shall never forget it, Nannie--my dear, unselfish Nannie."

[image]

"My own precious little sister, my unselfish darling," she cried.

Nannie looked past her sister towards the tall old painter standing behind her.

"Your lessons," she faltered, with quivering lips.

"My little heroine," said the old painter tenderly, "your sister is my favourite among all my pupils. I would rather," he went on, laying his hand on Rosalind's shoulder--"I would rather teach one real worker such as she is for love, than fifty of the usual kind who come to me. She is just the real worker one might expect with such a sister."

"You will go on teaching Rosalind," Nannie cried in a bewildered way, "for nothing?"

"I will, gladly," the maestro answered; "and, in return, you shall come one day, and bring the pug, and let me paint a picture of you both."

And then the old man went away, leaving the sisters, in the fulness of their joy, together.

For him this had been somewhat of a new experience--a pleasant one. They were young, and he was old; but he went back to his pictures with a heart fresh

and young as it had not been for years, asking of himself a question out of the pages of a favourite poet: "Shall I thank God for the green summer, and the mild air, and the flowers, and the stars, and all that makes the world so beautiful, and not for the good and beautiful beings I have known in it?"

Our Ada Elizabeth

"The sublime mystery of Providence goes on in silence, and gives no explanation of itself, no answer to our impatient questionings."--*Hyperion.*

CHAPTER I

The Dicki'sons lived in Blankhampton. Not in the fashionable suburb of Greater Gate, for the Dicki'sons were not fashionable people--far from it, indeed. Nor yet in that exclusive part which immediately surrounds the cathedral, which Blankhampton folk familiarly call "the Parish." No; they lived in neither of these, but away on the poorer side of the town and in the narrowest of narrow lanes--so narrow, indeed, that if a cart came along the passer-by was glad to get into a doorway, and stand there trembling until the danger was past and the road free again.

I must tell you that, although they were always *called* the Dicki'sons, their name was spelt in the usual way, with an "n" in the middle and without an apostrophe; but, as their neighbours made an invariable rule of pronouncing the word, as they did themselves, in the way in which I have written it, I will take the liberty of continuing the custom in this story.

For their position, they were rather well-to-do. Mr. Dicki'son, the father of the family, was a plumber and glazier--not in business for himself, but the foreman of a business of some importance in the town; and Mr. Dicki'son was a plain man of somewhat reserved disposition. There were ill-natured and rude persons in that neighbourhood who did not hesitate to describe Mr. Dicki'son as "a sulky beast"; but then the opinion of such was scarcely worth having, and even they had not a word to say against him beyond a general complaint of his unsociable temper.

They were lively people who lived round about Gardener's Lane. The fathers worked hard all the week, and mostly got frightfully drunk on Saturday nights, when they went home and knocked their dirty, slipshod wives about, just by way

of letting them know their duty to their lords and masters. And after this sort of thing had subsided, the wives generally gave the children a good cuffing all round, just by way of letting them know that they need not hope to take any liberties with their mothers because of their fathers' little ways; and then they all got quieted down for the night, and got up late on Sunday morning with headaches. If the day was fine, the men sat dull and sodden in the sunshine on the pavement in the wide street out of which Gardener's Lane ran, propping their backs against the wall and stretching their legs out, greatly to the danger and annoyance of passers-by; and while the men thus smoked the pipe of peace, the women stood in groups at their doorways, scratching their elbows and comparing their bruises; and the children, who had gone to sleep the previous night in tears and tribulation, found keen enjoyment in watching for the parson and the few people who went to the church round the corner, and called names and uncomplimentary terms after them as they turned in at the gates which led thereto.

Now, as Mr. Dicki'son was a person of a reserved and taciturn disposition, who was distinctly respectable in all his doings, who never got drunk, and openly despised any one else who did, it will readily be believed that he was not popular in the neighbourhood of Gardener's Lane. He was not anxious to be popular, and had it not been that the house in which he lived was his own, and that it suited his family as a home, Gardener's Lane would not have counted him among its inhabitants.

Mrs. Dicki'son was a good deal younger than her husband--a pretty, weak, sentimental woman, rather gushing in disposition, and very injudicious. She was always overwhelmed with troubles and babies; although, as a matter of fact, she had but six children altogether, and one of them died while still an infant. Gerty was twelve years old, and Ada Elizabeth just a year younger; then came a gap of two years ere a boy, William Thomas, was born. William Thomas, if he had lived, would, I fancy, have inherited his father's reserved disposition, for, I must say, a more taciturn babe it has never at any time been my lot to encounter. He was a dreadful trouble to his dissatisfied mother, who felt, and said, that there was something uncanny about a child who objected to nothing--who seemed to know no difference between his own thumb and the bottle which fed him, and would go on sucking as patiently at the one as at the other; who would lie with as much apparent comfort on his face as on his back, and seemed to find no distinction between his mother's arms and a corner of the wide old sofa, which earlier and later babies resented as a personal insult, and made remarks accordingly. However, after six months of this monotonous existence, William Thomas was removed from this lower sphere, passing away with the same dignity as he had lived, after which he served a good purpose still, which was to act as a model to all the other babies who resented the corner of the sofa and declined to accept the substitution

of their thumbs, or any other makeshift, for the bottle of their desires.

Two years later was a girl, called Polly, and two years later again was Georgie; and then, for a time, Mrs. Dicki'son being free from the cares of a baby, fretted and worried that "'ome isn't like 'ome without a baby in it." But when Georgie was just turned three little Miriam arrived, and Mrs. Dicki'son was able to change her complaint, and tell all her acquaintance that she did think Georgie was going to be the last, and she was sure she was "just wore out."

Most of the children took after their mother. True, as I have already said, William Thomas had given signs of not doing so; but William Thomas had not really lived long enough for any one to speak definitely on the subject. All the rest thrived and grew apace, and they all took after their mother, both in looks and character, with the exception of the second girl, "our Ada Elizabeth."

"The very moral of her father," Mrs. Dicki'son was accustomed to sigh, as she tried in vain to trim Ada Elizabeth's hat so that the plain little face underneath it should look as bright and fresh as the rosy faces of her sisters. But it was a hopeless task, and Mrs. Dicki'son had to give it up in despair and with many a long speech full of pity for herself that she, of all people in the world, should have such a hard trial put upon her as a child who was undeniably plain.

For the child was plain. She had been a plain, featureless baby, of uncertain colour, inclining to drab--very much, indeed, what William Thomas was after her. A baby who, even when newly washed, never looked quite clean; a little girl whose pinafore never hung right, and with tow-coloured hair which no amount of hair-oil or curl-papers could make anything but lank and unornamental! A child with a heavy, dull face, and a mouth that seldom relaxed into a smile though there were people (not Mrs. Dicki'son among them, though) who did not fail to notice that the rare smile was a very sweet one, infinitely sweeter than ever was seen on the four pretty rosy faces of the other children.

[image]

A child with a heavy, dull face.

Mrs. Dicki'son was eloquent about Ada Elizabeth's looks and temper. "I'm sure," she cried one day to Gerty, who was pretty, and quick of wit, and knew to a hair's-breadth how far she could go with her mother, "it's 'ard upon me I should have such a plain-looking child as our Ada Elizabeth. It's no use me trying to trim her hat so as to make her look a credit to us. I'm sure it's aggravating, it is. I've trimmed your two hats just alike, and she looks no better in hers than she does in her old school hat, and I got two nice curly tips just alike. 'Pon my word, it's quite

thrown away on her."

"And I want another feather in mine to make it perfect, Mother," murmured Gerty, with insinuating suggestiveness.

Mrs. Dicki'son caught at the bait thus held out to her. "I've a good mind to take the tip out," she said hesitatingly.

"Yes, do, Mother; our Ada Elizabeth won't care. Will you, Ada Elizabeth?" appealingly to the child who had had the misfortune to be born plain.

"No, I don't care," returned Ada Elizabeth, whose heart was bursting, not with jealousy, but with a crushing sense of her own shortcomings.

"Just like her father," remarked Mrs. Dicki'son, loosening the feather from its place with one snip of her scissors. "He never cares 'ow he looks! "Andsome is as 'andsome does,' is his motto; and though he's been a good 'usband to me, and I'd be the last to go again' him, yet I must say I do like a bit of smartness myself. But Ada Elizabeth's the very moral of her father--as much in her ways as she is in her looks."

So gradually it got to be an established custom that Ada Elizabeth's attire should be shorn of those little decorations with which Mrs. Dicki'son delighted to add effect to her eldest child's prettiness; it was felt to be quite useless to spend money over curly tips and artificial roses to put above such a plain little face, or "waste" it, as her mother put it, in the not very delicate way in which she tried to excuse herself to the child when some more obvious difference than usual between her clothes and Gerty's was contemplated.

Ada Elizabeth made no complaint. If asked her mind by the officious Gerty, she said she did not care, and the answer was accepted as literal truth by her mother and sister. But Ada Elizabeth did care. She was not jealous, mind--alas! no, poor child--she was only miserable, crushed with an ever-present consciousness of her own deficiencies and shortcomings, with a sense that in having been born plain and in having taken after her father she had done her mother an irreparable injury, had offered her the deepest insult possible! She honestly felt that it was a hard trial to her mother that she should have such a plain and dull child. More than once she made a desperate effort to chatter after Gerty's fashion, but somehow the Dicki'son family did not appreciate the attempt. Gerty stared at her and sniggered, and her mother told her with fretful promptness that she did not know what she was talking about; and poor Ada Elizabeth withdrew into herself, as it were, and became more reserved--"more like her father"--than ever, cherishing no resentment against those who had so mercilessly snubbed her, but only feeling more intensely than ever that she was unlike the rest of the world, and that her fate was to be seen as little as possible and not heard at all.

CHAPTER II

The time had come round for the great annual examination of the National Schools where the young Dicki'sons received their education, and on the great day itself the children came in at tea-time full to overflowing with the results of their efforts. And Ada Elizabeth was full of it too, but not to overflowing; on the contrary, she crept into the kitchen, where her father and mother and little two-year-old Miriam--commonly called "Mirry"--were already seated at the table, and put her school-bag away in its place with a shamefaced air, as if she, being an ignominious failure, could have no news to bring.

"Well," exclaimed Mrs. Dicki'son to Gerty, who threw her hat and bag down and wriggled into her seat with her mouth already open to tell her tale, "did you get a prize?"

"No, I didn't, Mother," returned Gerty glibly. "A nasty old crosspatch Miss Simmonds is; she always did hate me, and I think she hates me worse than ever now. Anyway, she didn't give me a prize--just to show her spite, nasty thing!"

Mrs. Dicki'son always declared that her husband was a slow man; and he looked up slowly then and fixed his dull eyes upon Gerty's flushed face.

"H'm!" he remarked, in a dry tone, and then closed his lips tight and helped himself to another slice of bread and butter.

Gerty's flushed face grew a fine scarlet. She knew only too well what the "h'm" and the dry tone and the tightly-closed lips meant, and made haste to change the subject, or, at least, to turn the interest of the conversation from herself to her sister.

"But our Ada Elizabeth's got the first prize of all," she informed them; and in her eagerness to divert her father's slow attention from herself, she spoke with such an air of pride in the unlooked-for result of the examination that Ada Elizabeth cast a glance of passionate gratitude towards her, and then visibly shrank into herself, as if, in having won so prominent a place, she had done something to make her mother's trials harder to bear than ever. "And there's going to be a grander treat than we've ever had this year," Gerty went on, in her glibest tones. "And the dean's lady, Lady Margaret, is going to give the prizes away, and all the company is going to be at the treat, and--and----"

"Oh! what a pity!" exclaimed Mrs. Dicki'son, turning a hopeless gaze upon poor Ada Elizabeth. "Our Ada Elizabeth 'll never show up properly, as you would, Gerty."

"Our Ada Elizabeth's lesson-books 'll show up better than Gerty's, may be," put in Mr. Dicki'son, in his quietest tone and with his driest manner.

"Oh! Ada Elizabeth's not clever like Gerty," returned Mrs. Dicki'son, utterly ignorant as she was indifferent to the fact that she was rapidly taking all the savour out of the child's hour of triumph. "And you were so sure of it too, Gerty."

"So was the hare of winning the race; but the tortoise won, after all," remarked Mr. Dicki'son sententiously.

"What *are* you talking about, Father?" his wife demanded. "I'm sure if tidy 'air has anything to do with it, Gerty ought to be at the top of the tree, for, try as I will, I *can't* make Ada Elizabeth's 'air ever look aught like, wash it and brush it and curl it as ever I will; and as for 'air-oil----"

Mr. Dicki'son interrupted his wife by a short laugh. "I didn't mean that at all"--he knew by long experience that it was useless to try to make her understand what he did mean--"but, now you speak of it, perhaps Ada Elizabeth's 'air don't make so much show as some of the others; it's like mine, and mine never was up to much--not but what there's scarcely enough left to tell what sort it is."

It was quite a long speech for the unsociable and quiet Mr. Dicki'son to come out with, and his wife passed it by without comment, only making a fretful reiteration of Ada Elizabeth's plainness and a complaint of the sorry figure she would cut among the great doings on the day of the school treat and distribution of prizes.

"*Is* our Ada Elizabeth a plain one?" said Mr. Dicki'son, with an air of astonishment which conveyed a genuine desire for information, then turned and scanned the child's burning face, after which he looked closely at the faces of the other children, so little like hers, and so nearly like that of his pretty, mindless, complaining wife. "Well, yes, little 'un, I suppose you're not exactly pretty," he admitted unwillingly; "you're like me, and I never was a beauty to look at. But, there, 'handsome is as handsome does,' and you've brought home first prize today, which you wouldn't have done, may be, if you'd always been on the grin, like Gerty there. Seems to me," he went on reflectively, "that that there first prize 'll stand by you when folks has got tired of Gerty's grin, that's what seems to me. I don't know," he went on, "that I set so much store by looks. I never was aught but a plain man, but I've made you a good husband, Em'ly, and you can't deny it. You'll mind that good-looking chap, Joe Webster, that you kept company with before you took up with me? He chucked you up for Eliza Moriarty. Well, I met her this morning, poor soul! with two black eyes and her lips strapped up with plaster. H'm!" with a sniff of self-approval, "seems to me I'd not care to change my plain looks for his handsome ones. 'Handsome is as handsome does' is *my* motto; and if I want aught doing for me, it's our Ada Elizabeth I asks to do it, that's all *I* know."

The great day of the school treat came and went. The dean's wife, Lady Margaret Adair, gave away the prizes, as she had promised, and was so struck

with "our Ada Elizabeth's" timid and shrinking air that she kept her for a few minutes, while she told her that she had heard a very good account of her, and that she hoped she would go on and work harder than ever. "For I see," said Lady Margaret, looking at a paper in her hand, "that you are the first in your class for these subjects, and that you have carried off the regular attendance and good-conduct prize as well. I am sure you must be a very good little woman, and be a great favourite with your schoolmistress."

Mrs. Dicki'son--who, as the mother of the show pupil of the day, and as a person of much respectability in the neighbourhood, which was not famous for that old-fashioned virtue, had been given a seat as near as possible to the daïs on which Lady Margaret and the table of prizes were accommodated--heard the pleasant words of praise, which would have made most mothers' hearts throb with exultant pride, with but little of such a feeling; on the contrary, her whole mind was filled with regret that it was not Gerty standing on the edge of the daïs, instead of the unfortunate Ada Elizabeth, who did not show off well. If only it had been Gerty! Gerty would have answered my lady with a pretty blush and smile, and would have dropped her courtesy at the right moment, and would have been a credit to her mother generally.

But, alas! Gerty's glib tongue and ready smiles had not won her the prizes which had fallen to poor little plain Ada Elizabeth's share, and Gerty was out in the cold, so to speak, among the other scholars, while Ada Elizabeth, in an agony of shyness and confusion, stood on the edge of the daïs, first on one foot and then on the other, conscious that her mother's eyes were upon her and that their expression was not an approving one, feeling, though she would hardly have been able to put it into words, that in cutting so sorry a figure she was making her poor mother's trials more hard to bear than ever. Poor little plain child, she kept courtesying up and down like a mechanical doll, and saying, "Yes, 'm," and "No, 'm," at the wrong moments, and she altogether forgot that the fresh-coloured, buxom lady in the neat black gown and with only a bit of blue feather to relieve her black bonnet was not a "ma'am" at all, but a "my lady," who ought to have been addressed as such. At last, however, the ceremony, and the games and sports, and the big tea were all over, and Ada Elizabeth went home with her prizes to be a heroine no longer, for she soon, very soon, in the presence of Gerty's prettiness and Gerty's glib tongue and ready smiles, sank into the insignificance which had been her portion aforetime. She had not much encouragement to go on trying to be a credit to the family which she had so hardly tried by taking after her father, for nobody seemed to remember that she had been at the top of the tree at the great examination, or, if they did recall it, it was generally as an example of the schoolmistress's "awkwardness" of disposition in having passed over the hare for the tortoise. Yet sometimes, when Gerty was extra hard upon Ada Elizabeth's

dulness, or Mrs. Dicki'son found the trial of her life more heavy to bear than usual, her father would look up from his dinner or his tea, as it might happen to be, and fix his slow gaze upon his eldest daughter's vivacious countenance.

"H'm! Our Ada Elizabeth's too stupid to live, is she? Well, you're like to know, Gerty; it was you won three first prizes last half, wasn't it? A great credit to you, to say nought about the 'good conduct and regular attendance.' Yes, you're like to know all about it, you are."

"Dear me, Gerty," Mrs. Dicki'son would as often as not chime in fretfully, having just wit enough to keep on the blind side of "Father," "eat your tea, and let our Ada Elizabeth alone, do; it isn't pretty of you to be always calling her for something. Our Ada Elizabeth's plain-looking, there's no saying aught again' it, but stupid she isn't, and never was; and, as Father says, "andsome is as 'andsome does'; so don't let me hear any more of it."

And all the time the poor little subject of discussion would sit writhing upon her chair, feeling that, after all, Gerty was quite right, and that she was not only unfortunately plain to look at, but that, in spite of the handsome prizes laid out in state on the top of the chest of drawers, there was little doubt that she was just too stupid to live.

CHAPTER III

It was a very mild and damp autumn that year, and the autumn was succeeded by an equally mild winter; therefore it is not surprising that the truth of the old saying, "A green Christmas makes a fat kirkyard," became sadly realized in the neighbourhood of Gardener's Lane.

For about the middle of December a dangerous low fever, with some leaning towards typhoid, broke out in the parish, and the men being mostly hard-drinkers, and the majority of the women idle drabs who did not use half-a-pound of soap in a month, it flew from house to house until half the population was down with it; ay, and, as nearly always happens, not only the hard-drinkers and the idle drabs were those to suffer, but the steady, respectable workmen and the good housewives came in for more than their just share of the tribulation also. And, among others, the Dicki'son family paid dearly for the sins and shortcomings of their fellow-creatures, for the first to fall sick was the pretty, complaining mother, of whom not even her detractors could say other than that she was cleanliness itself in all her ways. And it was a very bad case. The good parson came down

with offers of help, and sent in a couple of nurses, whom he paid out of his own pocket--though, if he had but known it, he would have done much more wisely to have spent the same amount of money on one with more knowledge of her business and less power of speech--and the doctor and his partner came and went with grave and anxious faces, which did not say too much for the sick woman's chance of recovery.

Mr. Dicki'son stayed at home from his work for a whole week, and spent his time about equally between anxiously watching his wife's fever-flushed face and sitting with his children, trying to keep them quiet--no easy task, let me tell you, in a house where every movement could be heard in every corner; and, as the schools were promptly closed, for fear of spreading the epidemic, the children were on hand during the whole day, and, poor little things, were as sorely tried by the silence they were compelled to keep as they tried the quiet, dull man whose heart was full almost to bursting.

But he was very patient and good with them, and Ada Elizabeth was his right hand in everything. For the first time in her life she forgot her plain looks and her mother's trials, and felt that she had been born to some purpose, and that purpose a good one. And then there came an awful day, when the mother's illness was at the worst, when the two nurses stood one on each side of the bed and freely discussed her state, in utter indifference to the husband standing miserably by, with Gerty's little sharp face peeping from behind him.

"Eh, pore thing, I'm sure!" with a sniff and a sob, "it is 'ard at 'er age to go i' this way--pore thing, it is 'ard. Which ring did you say Gerty was to 'ave, love?" bending down over the sick woman, who was just conscious enough to know that some one was speaking to her--"the keeper? Yes, love; I'll see to it. And which is for Ada Elizabeth?"

"Her breathing's getting much harder," put in the woman on the other side; "it won't be long now. T' doctor said there was a chance with care, but I know better. I've seen so many, and if it's the Lord's will to take her, He'll take her. We may do all we can, but it's no use, for I've seen so many."

Mr. Dicki'son gave a smothered groan, and turning sharply round went out of the room and down the narrow creaking stairs, with a great lump in his throat and a thick mist in front of his eyes. A fretful wail from little Mirry had fallen upon his ear, and he found her sobbing piteously, while Ada Elizabeth tried in vain to pacify her. She was more quiet when she found herself in his arms; and then he noticed, with a sudden and awful fear knocking at his heart, that there was something wrong with his right hand, Ada Elizabeth--that she looked fagged and white, and that there was a brilliancy in her dull grey eyes such as he had never seen there before.

"Ada Elizabeth, what ails you?" he asked anxiously.

[image]

"Ada Elizabeth, what ails you?" he asked anxiously.

"Nought, Father; I'm a bit tired, that's all," she answered, pushing her heavy hair away from her forehead. "Mirry was awake all night nearly, and I couldn't keep her quiet hardly."

Mr. Dicki'son looked closely at Mirry; but though the child was evidently heavy and inclined to be fretful, there was not the same glitter in her eyes as there was in her sister's.

"Here, Gerty," he said, "nurse Mirry a bit. I want to go upstairs for a minute."

"Can't Ada Elizabeth have her?" asked Gerty, who always wanted to be in the sick-room, so that she might know the latest news of her mother and be to the front whoever came--for in those dark days, between the rector and the doctors and the neighbours who came in and out, there were a good many visitors to the little house. "Our Ada Elizabeth always keeps Mirry quiet better than I can, father."

"Do as I bid you," returned Mr. Dicki'son sharply; and thus rebuked, Gerty sat crossly down and bumped little Mirry on to her knee with a burst of temper, which set the child wailing again.

Mr. Dicki'son had already reached the sick-room, where the nurses were still standing over his half-unconscious wife's bed.

"I want you a minute, missus," he said to the one who had been so anxious concerning the disposal of Mrs. Dicki'son's few bits of jewellery. "Just come downstairs a minute."

The woman followed him, wondering what he could want. "Just look at this little lass," he said, taking Ada Elizabeth by the hand and leading her to the window. "Do you think there is aught amiss with her?"

There is little or no reserve among the poor, they speak their minds, and they tell ill news with a terrible bluntness which is simply appalling to those of a higher station; and this woman did not hesitate to say what she thought, notwithstanding the fact that she knew that the man was utterly overwrought, and that the child's fever-bright eyes were fixed earnestly upon her.

"Mr. Dicki'son," she cried, "I'll not deceive you, no; some folks would tell you as nought ailed, but not me--wi' her pore mother dying upstairs. I couldn't find it in my 'eart to do it; I couldn't indeed. Pore Ada Elizabeth's took, and you'd better run round to Widow Martin's and see if t' doctor's been there this morning. He telled me I might send there for him up to one o'clock, and it's only ten minutes

past. Ada Elizabeth, lie down on t' sofa, honey, and keep yourself quiet. Gerty, can't you keep Mirry at t' window? Ada Elizabeth's took with the fever, and can't bear being tewed about wi' her."

Mr. Dicki'son was off after the doctor like a shot, and less than a quarter of an hour brought him back to see if the nurse's fiat was a true one. Alas! it proved to be too true, and the kind-hearted doctor drew the grief-stricken man on one side.

"Look here, Dicki'son," he said, "your wife is very ill indeed; it's no use my deceiving you--her life hangs on a thread, and it will be only by the greatest care if she is pulled through this. The child has undoubtedly got the fever upon her, and she cannot have the attention she ought to have here. There is not room enough nor quiet enough, and there's nobody to attend to her. Get her off to the hospital at once."

"The hospital!" repeated Mr. Dicki'son blankly. He had all the horror of a hospital that so many of his class have.

"It's the child's best chance," answered the doctor. "Of course, it may turn out only a mild attack. All the better that she should be in the hospital, in any case; in fact, I wish your wife was there this minute."

"Doctor," said Mr. Dicki'son hoarsely, "I don't like my little lass going to the hospital. I don't like it."

"But there is no help for it, and she'll be far better off there than she would be at home," the doctor answered; "but, all the same, they'd better not talk about it before your wife. Even when she is delirious or half-unconscious she knows a good deal of what's going on about her. I'll step up and have a look at her, and will speak to the women myself."

Before a couple of hours were over, Ada Elizabeth was comfortably in bed in the quiet and shady ward of the well-managed hospital, and in the little house in Gardener's Lane the struggle between life and death went on, while Gerty had to devote herself as best she could to the children. Gerty felt that it was desperately hard upon her, for Mirry and six-year-old Georgie fretted without ceasing for "our Ada Elizabeth," and would not be comforted; not, all the same, that Gerty's ideas of comfort were very soothing ones--a bump and a shake, and divers threatenings of Bogle-Bo, and a black man who came down chimneys to carry naughty children away, being about her form; and little Mirry and Georgie found it but a poor substitute for the tender if dull patience of "our Ada Elizabeth."

However, in spite of all the very real drawbacks which she had to fight against, Mrs. Dicki'son did not die; slowly and painfully she struggled back to her own senses again, with a dim realization of how very near the gate of death she had wandered. But, alas! by the time the doctor had, with a kindly pat upon his shoulder, told Mr. Dicki'son that his wife would live if no very serious relapse

took place, the fever had fastened on another victim, and little Mirry was tossing to and fro with fever-flushed face, and the same unnatural brilliancy in her bonny blue eyes as had lighted up Ada Elizabeth's dull, grey ones.

They had not taken her to the hospital; it was so full that only urgent cases were admitted now: and since the mother was on the road to recovery, there was time to attend to the child. And so she lay in the next room to her mother, whose weakened senses gradually awoke to the knowledge of what was going on about her.

"Is that Mirry crying?" she asked, on the morning when the child was at its worst.

"Now don't you fret yourself, love," returned the nurse evasively. "T' bairn's being took care of right enough; they will cry a bit sometimes, you know"; and then she shut the door, and the mother dozed off to sleep again.

But in the evening the pitiful wail reached her ears again. "I want our Ada 'Liz'bet'," the child's fretful voice cried; "Mirry do want our Ada 'Liz'bet' so bad-a-ly--me want our Ada 'Liz'bet'."

Mrs. Dicki'son started nervously and tried to lift herself in her bed. "I'm sure Mirry's ill," she gasped. "Mrs. Barker, don't deceive me. Tell me, is she ill?"

"Well, my dear, I won't deceive yer," the nurse answered; "poor little Mirry's been took with the fever--yes, but don't you go and fret yourself. Mrs. Bell's waiting of her, and she wants for nought, and t' doctor says it's only a mild attack; only children runs up and down so quick, and she's a bit more fretful than usual to-night, that's all."

"Mirry do want our Ada 'Liz'bet'," wailed the sick child in the next room.

Mrs. Dicki'son turned her head weakly from side to side and trembled in every limb.

"Why *can't* Ada Elizabeth go to her?" she burst out at last.

The nurse coughed awkwardly. "Well, my dear," she began, "poor Ada Elizabeth isn't 'ere."

"Isn't 'ere!" repeated Mrs. Dicki'son wildly, and just then her husband walked into the room and up to the bedside.

She clutched hold of him with frantic eagerness. "Father," she cried hysterically, "is it true our Mirry's took with the fever?"

"Yes, Em'ly; but it's a very mild case," he answered, feeling that it was best in her excited and nervous condition to tell her the exact truth at once. "She's fretty to-night, but she's not so ill that you need worry about her; she's being took every care of."

"But she's crying for our Ada Elizabeth," Mrs. Dicki'son persisted. "Hark! There she is again. Why *can't* Ada Elizabeth be quick and go to her? Where is she? What does Mrs. Barker mean by saying she isn't 'ere?"

Mr. Dicki'son cast a wrathful glance at the nurse, but he did not attempt to hide from his wife any longer the fact that Ada Elizabeth was not in the house. "You know you was very ill, Em'ly, a bit back," he said, with an air and tone of humble apology, "and our Ada Elizabeth was taken with the fever just the day you was at the worst; and there was no one to wait on her, and the doctor would have her go to the hospital, and--what was I to do, Em'ly? It went against my very heart to let the little lass go, but she was willing, and you was taking all our time. I was very near beside myself, Em'ly I was, or I'd never have consented."

Mrs. Dicki'son lay for some minutes in silence, exhausted by the violence of her agitation; then the fretful wail in the adjoining room broke the stillness again.

"I do *want* our Ada 'Liz'bet'," the child cried piteously. Mrs. Dicki'son burst out into passionate sobbing. "I lie 'ere and I can't lift my finger for 'er," she gasped out, "and--and--it was just like Ada Elizabeth to go and get the fever when she was most wanted; she always was the contrariest child that I had, always."

Mr. Dicki'son drew his breath sharply, as if some one had struck him in the face, but with an effort he pulled himself together and answered her gently: "Nay, wife--Emily, don't say that. The little lass held up until she couldn't hold up no longer. I'll go and quiet Mirry. She's always quiet enough with me. Keep yourself still, and I'll stop with the bairn until she's asleep"; and then he bent and kissed her forehead, and passed softly out of the room, only whispering, "Not one word" to the nurse as he passed her.

But, dear Heaven! how that man's heart ached as he sat soothing his little fever-flushed child into quietness! I said but now that he drew his breath sharply as if some one had struck him in the face. Alas! it was worse than that, for the wife of his bosom, the mother of his children, had struck him, stabbed him, to the lowest depths of his heart by her querulous complaint against the child who had gone from him only a few hours before, on whose little white, plain face he had just looked for the last time, and on which his scalding tears had fallen, for he knew that, plain, and dull, and unobtrusive as she had always been--the butt of her sister's sharp tongue, the trial of his wife's whole existence--he knew that with the closing of the heavy eyes the brightest light of his life had gone out.

And little Mirry, wrapped in a blanket, lay upon his breast soothed into slumber. Did something fall from his eyes upon her face, that she started and looked up at him? She must have mistaken the one plain face for the other, for she put up her little hot hand and stroked his cheek. "You tum back, Ada 'Liz'bet'?" she murmured, as she sank off to sleep again; "Mirry did want you *so* bad-a-ly." The sick child's tender words took away half the bitterness of the sting which his wife had thrust into his heart, and his whole soul seemed to overflow with a great gush of love as he swayed her gently to and fro. *She* had loved the unattractive face, and missed it bitterly; *she* had wearied for the rare, patient smile and the slow,

gentle voice, and, to Mr. Dicki'son's dull mind, the child's craving had bound Ada Elizabeth's heavy brows with a crown of pure gold, with the truest proof that "affection never was wasted."

[image]

"You tum back, Ada 'Liz'bet'?" she murmured.

Halt!

"Halt! Who goes there?" cried a man's voice through the thick gloom of the dark night.

There was no answer save silence; and, after listening for a moment, Private Flinders turned, and began to tramp once more along the ten paces which extended from his sentry-box. "I could have sworn I heard a footstep," he said to himself. "It's curious how one's ears deceive one on a night like this."

Ten paces one way, ten paces the other; turn, and back again, and begin your ten paces over again. Yes, it is monotonous, there is no doubt of that; but it is the bounden duty of a sentry, unless he happens to prefer standing still in his box, getting stiff and chill, and perhaps running the risk of being caught asleep at his post--no light offence in a barrack, I can tell you. Ten paces one way, ten paces the other--a rustling, a mere movement, such as would scarcely have attracted the attention of most people, but which caught Private Flinders' sharp ears, and brought him up to a standstill again in an attitude of strict watchfulness.

"Halt! Who goes there?" he cried again, and listened once more. Again silence met him, and again he stood, alert and suspicious, waiting for the reply, "Friend."

"By Gum, this is queer," he thought, as he stood listening. "I'll search to the bottom of it though. I daresay it's only some of the chaps getting at me; but I'll be even with 'em, if it is."

He groped about in rather an aimless sort of way, for the night was black as pitch; and his eyes, though they had grown used to the inky want of light, could distinguish nothing of his surroundings.

"Now, where are you, you beggar?" he remarked, beginning to lose his ha-

bitual serenity, and laying about him with his carbine. After a stroke or two the weapon touched something, though not heavily, and a howl followed--a howl which was unmistakably that of a small child. It conveyed both fear and bodily pain. Private Flinders followed up the howl by feeling cautiously in the part whence the sounds had come. His hand closed upon something soft and shrinking, and the howls were redoubled.

"Hollo! what the deuce are you?" he exclaimed, drawing the shrieking captive nearer to him. "Why, I'm blessed if it ain't a kid--and a girl, too. Well, I'm blowed! And where did you happen to come from?"

The howl by this time had developed into a faint sniffing, for Private Flinders' voice was neither harsh nor forbidding. But the creature did not venture on speech.

"Where did you come from, and what are you doing here?" he asked. "Do you belong to the barricks, and has your mammy been wollopping of you? Or did you stray in from outside?"

"Lost my mammy," the small creature burst out, finding that she was expected to say something.

"What's your mammy's name?" Flinders asked.

"Mammy, of course," was the reply.

"And what's your name?"

"Susy."

"Susy. Aye, but Susy what?"

"Susy," repeated the little person, beginning to whimper again.

"Where do you live?"

"At home," said Susy, in an insulted tone, as if all these questions were quite superfluous.

"Well! blest if *I* know what to do with you," said Flinders, pushing his busby on one side, and scratching his head vigorously. "I don't believe you belong to the barricks--your speech haven't got the twang of it. And if you've strayed in from outside, Gord knows what 'll become of you. Certain it is that you won't be let to stop here."

"Susy so cold," whimpered the mite pitifully.

"I should think you was cold," returned Private Flinders sympathetically. "I'm none too warm myself; and the fog seems to fair eat into one's bones. Well, little 'un, I can't carry you back to where you came from, that's very certain. I can't even take you round to the guard-room. Now, what the deuce am I to do with you? And I shan't be relieved for over a hour."

Private Flinders being one of the most good-natured men in creation, it ended by his gathering the child in his arms, and carrying her up and down on his beat until the relief came.

"Why, what's the meaning of this?" demanded the corporal of the guard, when he perceived the unusual encumbrance to the private's movements.

"Ah! Corporal, that's more than I can tell you," responded the other promptly. "This here kid toddled along over a hour ago; and as she don't seem to know what her name is, or where she come from, I just walked about with her, that she mightn't be froze to death. I suppose we'd best carry her to the guard-room fire, and keep her warm till morning."

"And then?" asked the corporal, with a twinkle in his eye, which the dark night effectually hid.

"Gord knows," was the private's quick reply.

Eventually, the mite who rejoiced in the name of Susy, and did not know whence she had come or whither she was going, was carried off to the guard-room and made as comfortable as circumstances would permit--that being the only course, indeed, at that hour of the night, or, to be quite correct, of the morning--which could with reason be followed.

She slept, as healthy children do, like a top or dog, and when she awoke in the morning she expressed no fear or very much surprise, and, having enquired in a casual kind of way for her mammy, she partook of a very good breakfast of bread and milk, followed by a drink of coffee and a taste or two of such other provisions as were going round. Later on Private Flinders was sent for to the orderly-room, and told to give the commanding officer such information as he was in possession of concerning the stray mite, who was still in the warm guard-room.

Now it happened that the commanding officer of the 9th Hussars was a gentleman to whom routine was a religion and discipline a salvation, and he expressed himself sharply enough as to the only course which could possibly be pursued under the present circumstances.

"We had better send down to the workhouse people to come and remove the child at once. Otherwise, we may have endless trouble with the mother; and, moreover, if it once got about that these barracks were open to that kind of thing, the regiment would soon be turned into a regular foundling hospital. Let the workhouse people be sent for at once. What did you say, Mr. Jervis? That the child might be quartered for a few hours among the married people. Yes, I daresay, but if the mother is on the look-out, which is very doubtful, she is more likely to go to the police-station than she is to come here. As to any stigma, the mother should have borne that in mind when she lost the child. On second thoughts, I think it is to the police-station that we should send; yes, that will be quite the best thing to do."

A few hours later the child Susy was transferred from the guard-room to the police-station, and there she made herself equally at home, only asking occasionally, in a perfunctory kind of way, for "Mammy," and being quite easily satisfied

when she was told that she would be coming along by-and-by.

During the few hours that she was at the police-station she became quite a favourite, and made friends with all the stalwart constables, just as she had done with one and all of the strapping Hussars at the cavalry barracks. She was not shy, for she answered the magistrate in quite a friendly way, though she gave no information as to her belongings, simply because she had no information to give. And the end was that she was condemned to the workhouse, and was carried off to that undesirable haven as soon as the interview with the magistrate was over.

"A blooming shame, I call it, poor little kid," said Private Flinders that evening to a group of his friends, in the comfortable safety of the troop-room. "She was a jolly little lass; and if I'd been a married man, I'd have kept her myself, dashed if I wouldn't!"

"Perhaps your missis might 'ave 'ad a word or two to say to that, Flinders," cried a natty fellow, just up to the standard in height, and no more.

"Oh, I'd have made it all right with her," returned Flinders, with that easy assurance of everything good that want of experience gives. "But to send it to the workhouse--it's a blooming shame! They treat kids anyhow in them places. Now then, Thomson, what are you a-grinning at? Perhaps you know as much about workhouses as I can tell you."

"Perhaps I do, and perhaps I don't," replied Thomson, with provoking good temper. "I wasn't a-laughing at the workhouse; cussing them is more like what one feels. But to think of you, old chap, tramping up and down with the blessed kid asleep--well, it beats everything I ever heard tell of, blame me if it don't."

Private Flinders, however, was not to be laughed out of his interest in the little child Susy; and regularly every week he walked down to the workhouse, and asked to see her taking always a few sweeties, bought out of his scanty pay, the cost of which meant his going without some small luxury for himself. And Susy, who was miserably unhappy in that abode of sorrow which we provide in this country for the destitute, grew to look eagerly for his visits, and sobbed out all her little troubles and trials to his sympathetic ears.

"Susy don't like her," she confided to him one day when the matron had left them alone together. "She slaps me. Susy don't love her."

"But Susy will learn to be a good girl, and not get slapped," the soldier said, with something suspiciously like a lump in his throat. "See, I've brought you some lollipops--you'll like them, won't you?"

He happened to run up against the matron as he walked away toward the door. "She's a tender little thing, missis," he remarked, with a vague kind of notion that even workhouse matrons have hearts sometimes. And so some of them have, though not many. This particular one was among the many.

"A very self-willed child," she remarked sharply, "considering that she's so

[image]

"She's a tender little thing, missis," he remarked.

young. We have a great deal of trouble with her. She does not seem to know the meaning of the word obedience."

"She is but a baby," ventured the soldier apologetically.

"Baby, or no baby, she'll have to learn it here," snapped the matron viciously; and then Flinders went on his way, feeling sadder than ever, and yet more and more regretful that he was not married, or had at least a mother in a position to adopt a little child.

The next time he went they had cut the child's lovely long, curling locks, indeed, she had been shorn like a sheep in spring-time. Flinders' soft heart gave a great throb, and he cuddled the mite to his broad breast, as if by so doing he could undo the indignity that had been put upon her.

"Susy," he said, when he had handed over his sweets and she was busily munching them up, "I want you to try and remember something."

Susy looked at him doubtfully, but nodded her cropped head with an air of wise acquiescence. Flinders went on talking quietly.

"You remember before you came here--you had a home and a mammy, don't you?"

"Yes," said Susy promptly.

"What sort of a house was it?"

"Where my mammy was?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Big," replied Susy briefly, selecting another sweetie with care.

"And what was it called?"

"The house," said the child, in a matter-of-fact tone.

Flinders gave a sigh. "Yes, I dare say it was. Don't you remember, though, what your mammy was called?"

"Why mammy, of course," said Susy, as if the question was too utterly foolish for serious consideration.

"Yes, but other people didn't call her mammy--it was only you did that," said Flinders desperately. "What did other people call her? Can't you remember that?"

It happened that Susy not only remembered, but immediately gave utterance to her recollections in such a way as fairly made the soldier jump. "They called my mammy 'my lady,'" she said simply.

Private Flinders gave the child a great hug, and put her down off his knee.

"Gord bless you, little 'un," he ejaculated. "And see if I don't ferret that mammy of yours out before I'm many days older--see if I don't."

He met the matron as he went towards the entrance. "Missis," he said, stopping, "I've got a clue to that little 'un's belongings. I'm off to the police station now about it. I'd advise you to treat her as tender as you can. It'll come home to you, mark my words."

"Dear me," snapped the matron; "is she going to turn out a princess in disguise, then?"

"It'll perhaps turn out a pity you was in such a hurry to crop her hair," said Private Flinders, with dignity.

In the face of that sudden recollection of the child's, he felt that he could afford to be, to a certain extent, stand-offish to the cold-eyed, unloving woman before him.

"Oh, rules are rules," said the matron, with an air of fine disdain; "and, in an institution like ours, all must be served alike. It would be a pretty thing if we had to spend half of every day curling the children's hair. Good-day to you."

He felt that he had got the worst of it, and that it was more than possible that little Susy would pay the penalty of his indiscretion. Fool that he had been not to hold his tongue until he had something more tangible to say. Well, it was done now, and could not be undone, and it behoved him to lose no time, but to find out the truth as soon as possible.

The inspector whom he found in charge of the police-station listened to his tale with a strictly professional demeanour.

"Yes, I remember the little girl coming in and being taken to the workhouse. I remember the case right enough. You'd better leave it to us, and we will find out whether such a child is missing anywhere in the country."

I need hardly say that in Private Flinders' mind there lurked that deep-rooted distrust of a policeman that lives somewhere or other in the heart of every soldier. It came uppermost in his mind at that moment.

"You'll do your best?" he said, a little wistfully. "You'll not let time go by, and--and----?"

"We shall be in communication with every police-station in the kingdom in a few hours," returned the inspector, who knew pretty well what was passing in the soldier's mind. "But, all the same, you mustn't be over-much disappointed if there proves to be nothing in it. You see, if such a child was being inquired for, we should have heard of it before this. However, we'll do our best; you may be very sure of that."

With that Private Flinders was obliged to rest content. He made inquiries from day to day, and eventually this advertisement appeared in the leading daily papers:--

TO PARENTS AND GUARDIANS.--A little girl, apparently about three years old, is in charge of the police at Bridbrook. She says her name is Susy, and appears to be the child of well-to-do parents. Very fair hair, blue eyes, features small and pretty. Clothes very good, but much soiled.--Address, POLICE STATION, BRIDBROOK.

A few hours after the appearance of the advertisement, a telegram arrived at the police-station:--

"Keep child. Will come as soon as possible.--JACKSON."

* * * * *

Less than three hours afterwards, an excited woman rushed into the station, having precipitated herself out of a cab, and almost flung herself upon the astonished inspector.

"I've come for the child--the little girl," she gasped, as if she had run at racing speed direct from the place indicated by the telegram.

"Oh, she belongs to you, does she?" remarked the inspector coolly. "Well, you've no call to be in such a 'urry; you've been very comfortable about her for the last six weeks."

"Comfortable!" echoed the excited one; "why, I've been very near out of my mind. I thought she was drowned, and I was so frightened, I daren't say a word to any one about it. And my lady away----"

"Then you're not the mother?" said the inspector sharply.

"The mother!--my goodness, no! I'm the head nurse. My young lady's mother is the Countess of Morecambe."

"Then what does *she* say to all this, pray?" he asked.

"My lady went abroad two months ago to one of those foreign cure places, and she doesn't know but what Lady Susy is safe with me at this minute," the woman replied.

The inspector gave a prolonged whistle.

"Well, you're a pretty sort of nurse to leave in charge of a child," he remarked. "I shouldn't wonder if you get the sack for this. Do you know the child's at the workhouse, and that they've cropped her head as bare as mine?"

At this the woman simply sat down and sobbed aloud.

"Aye, you may well cry," said the inspector grimly. "I should if I was in your shoes."

She finally told how the child had been missed; how she had refrained from giving notice to the police through fear of publicity, and believing she could find her by diligent search in the locality; how "my lady" was a widow, with only

this one little child; how she had been advised to go for this cure; how she had consented to the nurse taking Lady Susy to the seaside meantime, well knowing that she would be safe and happy with her.

"Yes, you may laugh at that," she wound up; "but my dear lamb has often called me 'mammy' as anything else, and my lady has often said she was quite jealous of me."

"All the same, I shouldn't wonder if you get the sack," repeated the inspector, who was not troubled with much sentiment.

I scarcely know how to tell the rest--how Jackson went off to the workhouse, and enlightened the matron and others as to the child's station in life; how she seized her little ladyship, and almost smothered her with kisses; how she bewailed her shorn locks, and wondered and conjectured as to how she could possibly have got to a place so far from her home as Bridbrook.

But, a few weeks later, a lovely woman in mourning came to the cavalry barracks, and inquired for Private Flinders. She wept during the interview, this lovely lady; and when she had gone away, Private Flinders opened the packet she had put into his hands, to find a cheque for a hundred pounds, and a handsome gold watch and chain. And at the end of the chain was a plain gold locket, on one side of which was engraved Private Flinders' initials, whilst on the other was written the single word, "Halt!"

The Little Lady with the Voice

A FAIRY TALE

Marjory Drummond was sitting on the bank of the river, and, if the whole truth must be owned, she was crying. She was not crying loudly or passionately, but as she rested her cheek on her hand, the sad salt tears slowly gathered in her eyes, and brimmed over one by one, falling each with a separate splash upon the blue cotton gown which she wore.

[image]

The sad salt tears slowly gathered in her eyes.

The sun was shining high in the blue heavens, the river danced and sang

merrily as it went rippling by, and all the hedgerows were alive with flowers, and the air was full of the scent of the new-cut hay. Yet Marjory was very miserable, and for her the skies looked dark and dull, the river only gave her even sadder thoughts than she already had, and the new-cut hay seemed quite scentless and dead. And all because a man had failed her--a man had proved to be clay instead of gold. And so she sat there in the gay summer sunshine and wished that she had never been born, or that she were dead, or some such folly, and the butterflies fluttered about, and the bees hummed, and all nature, excepting herself, seemed to be radiant and joyous. An old water-vole came out of his hiding-place by the river and watched her with a wise air, and a dragon-fly whizzed past and hovered over the surface of the sunlit water, but Marjory's eyes were blind to each and all of these things, and still the tears welled up and overflowed their bounds, and she wept on.

"What is the matter?" said a voice just at her ear.

Marjory gave a jump, and dashed her tears away; it was one thing to indulge herself in her grief, but it was quite another to let any one else, and that a stranger, see her. "What is wrong with you, Marjory?" said the voice once more.

"Nothing!" answered Marjory shortly.

"I may, perhaps, be able to help you," the gentle little voice persisted.

"Nobody can help me," said Marjory, with a great sigh, "nobody can help me--nobody."

"Don't be so sure of that," said the voice. "Why do you keep this curl of hair? Why do you turn so persistently away from me? Why don't you look at me?"

Marjory turned her head, but she could see no one near. "Who are you? Why do you hide?" she asked in turn.

"You look too high," said the voice. "Look lower; yes--ah, how d'you do?"

Marjory almost jumped into the river in her fright, for there, standing under the shade of a big dandelion, was the smallest being she had ever seen in her life. Yet, as she sat staring at her, this tiny woman seemed to increase in size, and to assume a shape which was somehow familiar to her. "You know me now?" asked the little woman, smiling at her again.

"N--o," replied Marjory, stammering a little.

"Oh, yes, you do. You remember the old woman whose part you took a few weeks ago--down by the old church, when some boys were teasing her? Well, that was me--me--and now I'm going to do something for you. I am going to make you happy."

"Are you a witch?" asked Marjory, in a very awed voice.

"Hu--sh--sh! We never use such an uncomplimentary word in *our* world. But you poor mortals are often very rude, even without knowing it. I am not what is called a witch, young lady. I am a familiar."

Marjory's eyes opened wider than ever; she bent forward and asked an earnest question: "Are you my familiar?" she said.

"Perhaps, perhaps," answered the little woman, nodding her head wisely. "That all depends on yourself. If you are good, yes; if you are bad, no--most emphatically, no. I am much too important a person to be familiar to worthless people."

"I'm sure you are very kind," said Marjory meekly. "But what will you do to make me happy? You cannot give me back my Jack, because he has married some one else--the wretch!" she added under her breath, but the ejaculation was for the woman whom Jack had married, not for Jack himself.

"You will learn to live without your Jack, as you call him," said the little woman with the soft voice, sagely, "and to feel thankful that he chose elsewhere. You once did me a service, and that is a thing that a familiar never, never forgets. I have been watching you ever since that time, and now I will reward you. Marjory Drummond, from this time henceforth everything shall prosper with you; everything you touch shall turn to gold, everything you wish shall come to pass; what you strive after you shall have; your greatest desires shall be realised; and you shall have power to draw tears from all eyes whenever you choose. This last I give you in compensation for the tears that you have shed this day. Farewell!"

"Stay!" cried Marjory. "Won't you even tell me your name? May I not thank you?"

"No. The thanks are mine," said the little lady. "When we meet again I will tell you my name--not before."

In a moment she was gone, and so quickly and mysteriously did she go that Marjory did not see her disappear. She rubbed her eyes and looked round. "I must have been asleep!" she exclaimed. "I must have dreamt it."

* * * * *

Several years had gone by. With Marjory Drummond everything had prospered, and she was on the high road to success, and fame, and fortune. Whenever her name was spoken, people nodded their heads wisely, and said: "A wonderful girl, nothing she cannot do"; and they mostly said it as if each one of them had had a hand in making her the clever girl that she was.

As an artist she was extremely gifted, being well hung in the Academy of the year; as an actress, though only playing with that form of art, she was hard to beat; and she had written stories and tales which were so infinitely above the average that editors were one and all delighted at any time to have the chance of a story signed with the initials "M.D.," initials which the world thought and declared were those of one of the most fashionable doctors of the day.

And at last the world of letters woke up and rubbed its eyes very much as Marjory had rubbed her eyes that day on the river's bank, and the world said, "We have a great and gifted man among us." "'M.D.' is *the* writer of the time." And slowly, little by little, the secret crept out, and Marjory was fêted and flattered, and made the star of the season. Her name was in every one's mouth, and her work was sought after eagerly and read by all. And among those who worshipped at her shrine was the "Jack" who had flouted her in the old days, yet not quite the same, but a "Jack" very much altered and world-worn, so that Marjory could no longer regret or wish that the lines of her life had fallen otherwise than they had done.

And often and often, as the years rolled by, and she was still the darling star of the people who love to live in the realms of fiction, did Marjory ponder over that vivid dream by the riverside, and try to satisfy herself that it really was no more than a dream, and that the old lady with the sweet clear voice had had no being except in her excited brain. "I wish," she said aloud one day, when she was sitting by the fire after finishing the most important work that had ever yet come from her pen, "I wish that she would come back and satisfy me about it. It seemed so real, so vivid, so distinct, and yet it is so impossible----"

"Not impossible at all," said a familiar voice at her elbow.

Marjory looked round with a start. "Oh! is it you?" she cried. "Then it was all true! I have never been able to make up my mind whether it was true or only a dream. Now I know that it was quite real, and everything that you promised me has come about. I am the happiest woman in all the world to-day, and, dear friend, if ever I did a service to you, you have amply repaid me."

"We never stint thanks in our world," said the little old lady, smiling. "Then there is nothing more that you want?"

"Yes, kind friend, just one thing," said Marjory. "You promised me that when we met again you would tell me your name."

The little woman melted away instantly, but somewhere out of the shadows came a small sweet sighing voice, which said softly, "My name is--Genius!"

Jewels to Wear

"Torches are made to burn;
jewels to wear."--*Shakespeare*

CHAPTER I

"I can't think, Nancy, why you cannot get something useful to occupy yourself with. It seems to me that I have slaved and sacrificed myself all my life, in every possible direction, simply that you may waste your whole time spoiling good paper, scribbling, scribbling, scribbling, from morning till night, with your fingers inky, and your thoughts in the clouds, and your attention on nothing that I want you to attend to. I don't call it a good reward to make to me. You will never do any good with that ridiculous scribbling--never! When I think of what you *might* save me, of how you *might* spare me in my anxious and busy life, it makes me positively ill to think I am your mother. Here have I been thinking of you, Nancy, and working for you, and struggling, and fighting, and slaving for you for twenty years, and now that the time has come when you might do something for me, you have only one idea in your head, and that is writing rubbishy stories that nobody will ever want to buy!"

[image]

"You have only one idea in your head, and that is writing rubbishy stories that nobody will ever want to buy!"

The girl thus addressed turned and looked at her mother.

"Mother, dear," she said depreciatingly, "I am sorry that I am not more useful. I can't help it. I do think of you, I try to do everything I can to relieve you, and help you; but these stories will come into my head. They won't be put out of it. What am I to do?"

"What are you to do?" echoed the mother. "Why, look at that basket of stockings to darn!"

"I am quite willing to darn them," said Nancy meekly.

"Yes, you are quite willing, I daresay. You are quite willing *when* I tell you. But you don't seem to see what a burden it is to me to have to tell you everything as if you were a baby. There are the stockings, and there are you; at your age, you don't surely need me to tell you that the stockings need mending!"

"I will do them at once," said Nancy. "I will do them this minute."

"Yes, with your thoughts in the clouds, and your mind fixed on scribbling. What, may I ask you, Nancy, do you think you will ever do with it?"

"I don't know," said Nancy desperately. "Perhaps I may make some money

some day."

"Never, never! Waste it, you mean. Waste it over pens, ink, paper and tablecloths. There is the tablecloth in your bedroom spotted with ink from end to end. It is heart-breaking."

"Well, Mother, what do you wish me to do?" the girl asked in desperation.

"Your plain and simple duty. I would like you to give up all idea of wasting your time in that way from now on," said the mother deliberately.

"Won't you even let me write a little to amuse myself in my spare time?" asked the girl piteously.

"Your spare time!" echoed the mother impatiently. "What spare time have poor people such as we are? What spare time have I? Here are we with this great boarding-house on our hands, twenty-three boarders to be made comfortable, kept in good temper, fed, housed, boarded--everything to be done for them, and I have to do it. Why, in the time that you waste over those stories, you might make yourself a brilliant pianist, and play in the evening to them. Then you would be of some use."

"I don't think," said Nancy, "that anything will ever make me a brilliant pianist, Mother. There's no music in me--not of that kind, and I don't think that the boarders would like me half as well if I went and strummed on the drawing-room piano every evening for an hour or two, I really don't, Mother."

"No, you know better than I do, of course. That is the way with the young people of the present day. You are all alike. Ah, it was different when I was a girl. I would no more have dreamed of defying my mother as you defy me----"

"Mother, I don't defy you," Nancy broke in indignantly. "I never defied you in my life. I never thought of such a thing."

"Don't you write stories in defiance of my wishes?" Mrs. Macdonald asked, dropping the tragedy air, and putting the question in a plain, every-day, businesslike tone.

At this, Nancy Macdonald flushed a deep full red, a blush of shame it was, or what felt like shame, and as it slowly faded away until her face was a dull greyish white, all hope for that gift which was as the very mainspring of her life, seemed to shrink and die within her.

"Mother," she said at last, in a firm tone, "I will do what you wish. I will give up writing, I promise you, from this time forward, and I will not write at all while I have any duty left in the day. You will not mind my doing a little when I have seen the after dinner coffee served, will you?"

"That means, I suppose," said Mrs. Macdonald rather tartly, "that you will sit up half the night ruining your health, spoiling your eyesight, wasting my gas, and making it perfectly impossible that you should get up in good time in the morning."

"Mother," said the girl, in a most piteous tone, "when I am once late in the morning, I will promise you to give it up altogether, and for ever; more than that I cannot say. As you said just now, it is a hard life here, and we have not very much leisure time; but, I implore you, do not take my one delight and pleasure from me altogether!"

"If you put it in that way," said Mrs. Macdonald rather grudgingly, "of course, we can but try the experiment; but what good, I ask you, Nancy, do you think will ever come of it!"

"I don't know," said Nancy; "I can't say. Other people have made fortunes; other people have done well by writing; why should not I?"

"As if *you* would ever make a fortune!" said Mrs. Macdonald, with the contemptuousness of a woman to whom the struggle of life had been hard and to whom pounds, shillings and pence in the very hand were the only proofs of reason for what she called "wasting time" over story-writing.

"Well, if not a fortune, at least a comfortable income," said Nancy eagerly; "and if I did, Mother, I should give it all to you!"

"Thank you for nothing, my dear," was the ungracious reply.

To this Nancy made no answer. She carried the big basket of stockings to the window, and sat down in the cold winter light to do such repairs as were necessary. Poor child! It was a hard fate for her. She was the eldest of a family of five, all dependent on the exertions of her widowed mother in keeping afloat the big boarding-house by which they lived. For a boarding-house, be it ever so liberally managed, be the receipts ever so generous, is but a sordid abode, especially to those who have the trouble and care of managing it; and to an eldest daughter, and one who stands between the anxious mother and the younger children, who mostly resemble young rooks with mouths chronically open, such a life appears perhaps more sordid than it does to any one else.

To Nancy Macdonald, with her mind full of visionary beauty, and living daily in a world of her own--not a world of boarding-houses--the life they lived seemed even more sordid, more trivial, more petty, than it was in reality. Her wants were not many; she was never inclined to rail at fate because she had not been born with a silver spoon in her mouth, not at all. But if only she could have a quiet home, with an assured income, just sufficient to cover their modest wants, to provide good wholesome food, to buy boots and shoes for the little ones, to pay the wages of a good servant, to take those lines of anxious care from her mother's forehead, so that she could employ her leisure in cultivating her Art--she always called it her Art, poor child!--she would have been perfectly happy, or she *thought* she would have been perfectly happy, which, in the main, amounted to the same thing. As she sat in the cold light of that winter's afternoon, darning, as if for dear life, the great pile of stockings which were her portion, she soon drifted away from

the tall Bloomsbury dwelling into a bright, brilliant land of romance, where there were no troubles, no cares, where nothing was sordid, and everything was bright and rosy, and even troubles and worries might have been adequately described as "double water gilt."

Young writers do indulge in these blessed dreams of fancy, and Nancy, remember, was only twenty. Her heroines were always lovely, always extravagantly rich or picturesquely poor; her heroes were all lithe and long, and most of them had tawny moustaches, and violet eyes like a girl's. They were all guardsmen or noblemen. They knew not the want of money; if they were *called* poor, they went everywhere in hansoms, and had valets and gambling debts. It was an ideal world, and Nancy Macdonald was very happy in it.

From that time forward a new life began for the girl. The household certainly went more smoothly, because of that promise to her mother; and Mrs. Macdonald's sharp tongue whetted itself on other grievances more frequently than on that old one about Nancy's scribbling propensities. It was irritating to Nancy, of course, to hear her mother continually nagging about something or other; but then, as she reminded herself very often during the day, her mother had great anxieties and grievous worries. She was a sort of double-distilled Martha, "careful and troubled," not about many things, but about everything--everything that did happen, or might happen, even what could happen under given circumstances which might and probably never would occur. Still, it was not so trying to bear when the shafts of sarcasm and complaining were aimed at others instead of herself, and to do Nancy strict justice, she did try honestly to do the work which lay to her hand.

In the midst of the multitudinous cares of the large household it must be owned that the girl's writing suffered. It is all very well for a girl in fiction to do scullery work all day long, and write the brilliant novel of a season in odd moments, in a cold and cheerless bedroom, but in real life it is very different. Nancy Macdonald gave her attention to stockings and table-linen, and shopping and ordering and dusting; to keeping boarders in good temper, and making herself generally useful; to superintending the education and manners of the little ones, to smoothing down the rough edges of her mother's chronic asperity--in short, to being a real help; but her much loved work practically went to the wall. She dreamed a good deal while she was doing other things, but mere dreaming is not of much help towards making name or fortune; work is the only road which leads to either. Still, you cannot do your duty without improving your character, and Nancy Macdonald's character was strengthening and softening every day. She worked a little at night, but often she was far too tired and weary to attempt it. Very often when she did so, she found that the words would not run, the incidents would not connect themselves, and frequently that her eyes would not

keep open; and then I am obliged to say that it was not an uncommon thing for Nancy Macdonald to get into bed and cry herself to sleep.

Still, her character was strengthening. With every day that went by she learnt more of the power of endurance; she became more patient, more fixed in her ideas; the goal of her desires was set more immediately in front of her. It was less visionary, but it was infinitely more substantial. In a desultory kind of a way she still worked, still wrote of lords and ladies whom she did not know in the flesh, still drew pictures of guardsmen with longer legs and tawnier moustaches even than before. She spent the whole of her pocket-money (which, by the bye, consisted of certain perquisites in the house, the medicine bottles and the dripping forming her chief sources of income) on manuscript paper, and was sometimes hard pushed to pay the postage on the mysterious packages which she smuggled into the post-office, and to provide the stamps for paying the return fare of these children of her fancy. Poor things, they always required it. No enterprising editors wanted the long-legged guardsmen, their blue eyes and tawny moustaches notwithstanding. Nobody had a welcome for the lovely ladies, who were all dressed by Worth, though they never seemed to have heard of such a person as Felix. The disappointments of their continued return were very bitter to her; yet, at heart, Nancy Macdonald was a true artist, and had all the true artist's pluck and perseverance, so that she never thought of giving up her work. It was only that she had not yet found her *métier*.

CHAPTER II

For about six months after Nancy's promise to her mother that she would not even try to write during the working hours, life went fairly prosperously with the widowed boarding-house keeper. Then a spell of bad luck set in. Several boarders left and were not replaced. Their best paying permanent boarder--a rich old gentleman, the head of a large business in the city--died suddenly, died without a will, although he had several times spoken of his intention of leaving Mrs. Macdonald a handsome legacy; and his next-of-kin did not seem to think it necessary to do more than pay the actual expenses which their relative had incurred. Twice they had visitors who left without paying their bills; and, as a last crowning act of ill-luck, the youngest child fell sick, and the doctor pronounced the illness to be scarlet fever.

"When troubles come, they come not single spies,
But in battalions";

and that is as true to-day as when Shakespeare penned the lines more than three hundred years ago.

Mrs. Macdonald was almost beside herself. She ceased to gird at any member of the family or household; she girded at Fate instead, morning, noon, and night. She discussed the situation in a frenzied manner, with tears in her eyes and a large amount of gesticulation, which would have formed an excellent object-lesson to a student for the stage; but, at the same time, it must be owned that raving appeals to the Almighty, passionate assertions that she was the most unlucky woman that the light of day had ever shone upon, bitter forebodings of what her daily life would be like when she was safely landed in the nearest workhouse, did not avail anything. No, the Macdonald family was in for a spell of bad luck, and all the asseverations in the world would not alter it or gainsay it.

At this time Nancy was like a rock in the midst of a stormy sea. She, after much self-communing, threw over her promise to her mother concerning the time of her writing. She felt, as every true artist feels, that it was in her to do great things; and that even a little money earned in such a crisis would be of double value. So every moment that she could steal from the now greatly decreased house duties she spent in her own room, working with feverish haste and anxiety at a new story, a story which was not about lords and ladies, or majestic guardsmen, or lovely heroines in costly Parisian dresses; no, she felt, all in a moment, the utter futility of trying to draw a phase of life with which she herself was not familiar. It seemed to come to her like a flash of light that her children of pen and ink were not real; that she was fighting the air; that she was like an artist drawing without a model. Like a living human voice a warning came into her mind, "Write what you know; write what you see; before all things be an impressionist." So her new child was slowly coming to life, a child born in poverty and reared in a boarding-house. The form of the child was crude, and was the work of an unpractised hand; but it was strong. It was full of life; it was a thing alive; and as line after line came from under her hand, as the story assumed shape and colour from under her nervous fingers, Nancy Macdonald felt that she was on the right tack at last, that this time she would not fail.

As soon as her story was done, she sent it with breathless hope to a well-known weekly magazine which is almost a household word, and then she sat down to wait. Oh! but it is weary waiting under such circumstances. After three days of sickening suspense, Nancy decided in her own mind that if she had to wait as many weeks she would be raving mad at the end of them. So she locked herself in her room and began another story, the story of a love affair which came about

in just such a house as their own.

Meantime, it can scarcely be said that the Macdonald fortunes improved. It is true that the fever-stricken child recovered, and was sent away to a superior convalescent home at the seaside. It is true that one or two fresh boarders came, and that there were hopes that the family would be able to weather the storm, supposing, that is, that they were able to tide over the next few months. Still, in London, it is not easy to tide over a few months when your resources have been drained, and your income has been sorely diminished. There were bills for this and that, claims for that and the other, and these came in with great rapidity and with pressing demands for payment.

Mrs. Macdonald pitied herself more than ever; her tones, as she recalled the virtues of her past life, were more tragic; her debit and credit account with the Almighty she showed to be clearly falsified. Never was so good a woman so abominably used of Providence and humanity alike. She wept copiously over her deservings, and railed furiously against her fate. Poor Mrs. Macdonald! For many a weary year she had toiled to the best of her ability, and she had done her duty by her children according to her lights, which were pitiably dim, "The Lord must indeed love me," she remarked, with bitterest irony, one day, when a mysterious visitor had put a gruesome paper into her unwilling hands.

"It is but the beginning of the end, Nancy," she said resignedly, "the beginning of the end. I haven't a sovereign in the house, and how I am to pay nine pounds seventeen and fourpence is beyond me altogether. It won't last long; we shall have the roof of the workhouse over our heads soon. We can't go on like this. Where's the money to come from?"

And that, of course, Nancy knew no more than her mother.

"Could not we sell something?" she said, looking round their shabby little sitting-room, where all that was worst in the house was gathered together because it was only used by themselves. "Couldn't we sell something?"

"I might sell my cameo brooch," said Mrs. Macdonald, with a huge sigh. "It was the last present your poor father ever gave me."

"And I don't suppose it would fetch anything like nine pounds seventeen and fourpence," said Nancy doubtfully.

"Your father paid a great deal for it," returned Mrs. Macdonald, "but when one has to sell, it's different to buying. One gives one's things away."

As a matter of fact, the late Mr. Macdonald had given fifty shillings for the cameo brooch in question, having bought it in a pawnshop in the Strand; but neither Mrs. Macdonald nor Nancy were aware of that fact.

"Dear Mother," said Nancy, "I would not worry. You have still a fortnight before you need settle it one way or the other. A great many things may turn up in a fortnight."

"Not a ten pound note," said Mrs. Macdonald, with an air of conviction.

"You don't know, Mother. Look how many things have turned up when we least expected them, and money has come that seemed to have dropped from the clouds. At all events, I would not break down over it until the very last day comes; I would not indeed, Mother."

"Ah, perhaps you would not," said the mother, "I should not have done so when I was your age. When you are mine, you will understand me better."

"Yes, dear, perhaps I shall; but you know, even if the worst happens--oh, but we shall manage somehow, depend upon it, we shall manage somehow."

But Nancy's youthful philosophy did not tend to check the flow of Mrs. Macdonald's troubled spirit. A whole week went by, which she passed chiefly in tears, and in drawing gloomy pictures of the details of the life which would soon, soon be hers. "I shall have to wear a poke bonnet and a shawl," she remarked, in a doleful tone one day, "and I never could bear a shawl, even when they were in fashion--horrid cold things." At meals, of course, poor lady, she had to keep a cheerful countenance, so that her guests should not suspect how badly things were going with them; but Nancy noticed that she ate very little, and like most young people, her chief idea for a panacea for all woes took the form of food. In Mrs. Macdonald's case, it took the form of fresh tea and hot buttered toast; and, really, I would be sorry to say how much tea was used in that household during those few days, by way of bolstering its mistress's strength and spirits against what might happen in the immediate future.

The fortnight of grace soon passed away, and with every day Mrs. Macdonald's spirits sank lower and lower. She looked old and aged and worn; and Nancy's heart ached when she realised that there was no prospect of anything turning up, and apparently no chance of the danger which threatened them being averted. What money had come in had mostly been imperatively required to meet daily expenses. It seemed preposterous that people with a large house as they had should be in such straits for so small a sum; and yet, if they began selling their belongings, which, with the exception of the cameo brooch and Mrs. Macdonald's keeper ring, almost entirely consisted of furniture, she knew that it would be impossible to replace them, or even to dispose of them without the knowledge of their guests. She hardly liked to suggest it to her mother, and yet she felt that when the last day came, she would have no other course open to her.

It was the evening before the last day of grace, and still the needful sum had not been set aside. Twice during the day Mrs. Macdonald had subsided in tears and wretchedness into the old armchair by their little sitting-room fire, while Nancy had brought her fresh fragrant tea and a little covered plate of hot buttered toast, and had delicately urged her to decide between selling the precious brooch and appealing to one or other of the boarders for an advance payment.

"I will just wait till the morning," she said to herself, as she came down from the drawing-room after dispensing the after-dinner coffees.

"Nancy! Nancy!" cried her younger sister Edith, at that moment. "Where are you?"

"I am here, dear," Nancy replied. "What is the matter?"

The child, for Edith was only some thirteen or fourteen years old, came running up the stairs two steps at a time.

"Here's a letter for you, Nancy," she said eagerly.

"A letter?" cried Nancy, her mind flying at once to her story.

"Yes, it's got a Queen's head on it or something. Here it is."

The two girls reached the large and dimly-lighted entrance-hall together, one from upstairs and one from down.

"Give it to me," said Nancy, breathlessly.

She felt that it was a letter about her story. The very fact that it had come without an accompanying roll of manuscript gave her hope. She tore open the envelope with trembling fingers, and by the light of the single flickering gas-lamp, read its contents.

"The Editor of the *Family Beacon* presents his compliments to Miss Macdonald, and will be pleased to accept her story, 'Out of Gloom into the Sun,' for the sum of fifteen guineas, for which a cheque will be sent immediately on receipt of her reply."

For a few moments the poor painted hall, with its gaunt umbrella stand and cold black and white marble floor, seemed to be rocking up and down, and spinning round and round. The revulsion of feeling was so intense that the girl staggered up against the wall, fighting hard with her palpitating heart.

"Oh, Nancy, what is it?" cried Edith, staring in a fright at her sister's chalk-white face. "Is it bad news?"

"Oh, no, GOOD news; the best news. Where's Mother? I----" she could not speak, she simply could not finish the sentence. Her trembling lips refused to perform their office. In her shaking hands she still clutched the precious letter, and gathering her wits together, she turned and literally tore down the stairs to the basement.

"Mother! Mother! Where are you?" she cried.

"What is it?" cried Mrs. Macdonald, who, poor soul, was ready for all and every evil that could fall upon her.

For a moment Nancy tried to control herself sufficiently to speak, but the revulsion of feeling was too great. Twice she opened her mouth, but no words

would come. Then she dropped all of a heap at her mother's feet, and hiding her head upon her knee, she burst into a passion of tears.

[image]

Then she dropped all of a heap at her mother's feet, and hiding her head upon her knee, she burst into a passion of tears.

In spite of her acidity, and her disputes with Providence and things in general, Mrs. Macdonald still retained some of her mother's instinct. She drew the girl's head to her breast, and held her there tightly, with a tragic at-least-we-will-all-die-together air that was utterly pathetic. She had no words of consolation for what she believed was some new and terrible trouble come upon them. Then, as Nancy still sobbed on, she drew the letter from her unresisting fingers, mastered its contents, and sat like a woman turned to stone.

"I am afraid," she said, after a long silence, "that I have been very cruel to you, Nancy. I have called your scribbling, rubbish; I have scolded you; I have been very hard on you; and instead of my being punished for my blindness, it is *your* work which has come to save me from the end which I so dreaded. But I shall never forgive myself."

But Nancy, the storm over, brushed the tears away from her eyes, and sat back, resting her elbow upon her mother's knee.

"Oh, it is very silly of me to go on like this," half laughing, and half inclined to weep yet more. "I have been so worried you know, Mother. It's really stupid of me; but you mustn't blame yourself now that good luck has come to us, must you? You did what you thought was right, and you had a right to speak; and, after all, I *did* leave everything to you--everything, and I might have wasted all my time. You were quite right, Mother."

"What was that line Willie was writing in his copybook last week?" said Mrs. Macdonald, holding the girl's hand fast, and looking, oh, so unlike her usual self--"Torches were made to burn; jewels to wear."

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